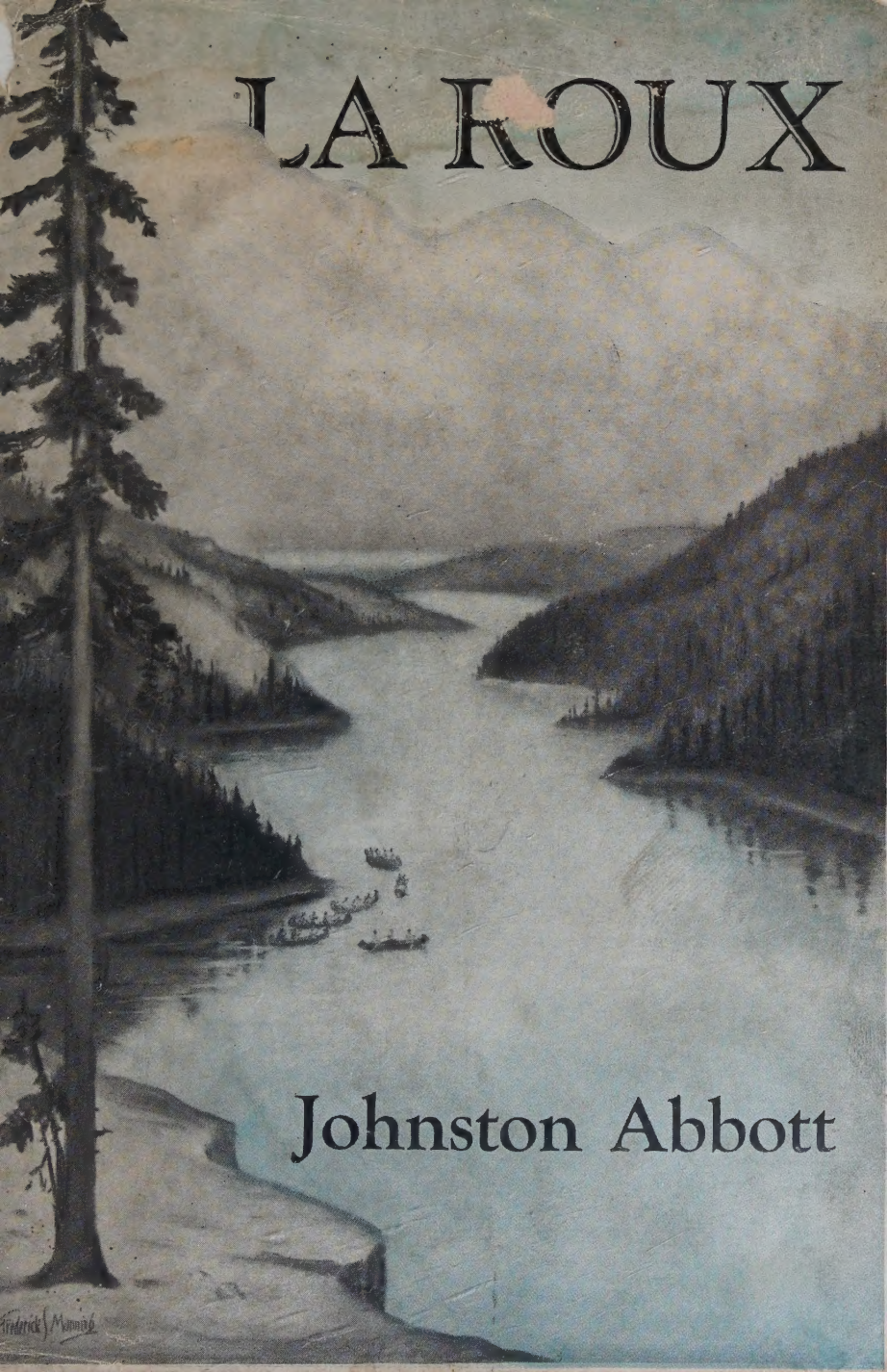
LA ROUX



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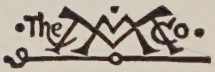

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LA ROUX

BY

JOHNSTON ABBOTT

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LA ROUX

CHAPTER I

In New France, in the year 1641, the first week of August was marked by weather that was dismal, drizzling and, in short, detestable. This weather persisted until noon of the eighth of the month, when the rain abated; by four o'clock, at which hour I sighted the sails of the ship which I awaited, a zone of brightness marked the edge of the watery clouds and flooded the northern cliffs. When I climbed aboard the vessel, the sun peered diffusely through the mist; his milky sheen, tinged with the first flame of approaching sunset, glistened on wet spars and dripping canvas, lighted up the faces of sailors and passengers, and lent added loveliness to the matchless features of the fair and noble lady whom I was later to know as Louise de Chatillon, of La Roux in Auvergne.

I recall the scene in every minute detail. Madeleine, the squaw of Ignace, or rather, his wife (they

had not long since been baptized and married on the same day), had come with me, bringing fresh-caught fish in the hope of barter, and while I greeted the captain she displayed her fish to the seamen. She had long ago suffered the fate of the women of her race, whose life of drudgery and privation early robs them of whatever charms they initially possess, so that her appearance was far from attractive, and as I looked from her countenance to that of Mlle. de Chatillon, who was inspecting with the deepest interest this uncouth inhabitant of a land which was new to her, it occurred to me that it would be hard to find a more striking contrast. Than the one, I have seen few uglier; than the other, none more beautiful.

With her was M. de Chatillon, her cousin,—a tall, florid gentleman of handsome appearance, richly attired. The glitter of his sword hilt and the jewelled buckle in his plumed hat spoke of a full purse. A certain plumpness and smoothness of his face bore witness to an easy life and a stomach well supplied. He was at that time thirty-two years of age.

Others were there, missionaries and settlers, many of whom I later came to know, but for me the interest of the scene centered in Mlle. de Chatillon, and as I set about my task of piloting the ship up the river to the basin of Quebec, I found myself wondering what had brought her to this rough, stern land, who was

still in the springtime of life, the season of the rose and the lily.

It was by the merest chance that it had fallen to my lot to take the helm of the little vessel "La Vierge" hailing from La Rochelle; it happened that Abraham, the official pilot, was indisposed, and because I had a boat in which I was accustomed to sail up and down the river, I had been asked to take his place. This request I had, on the whole, welcomed, since the errand would afford a congenial relief from the humdrum of the farm; had I known what vile weather I was to meet, I should have thought twice of it. I had journeyed down to the place where the river widens out, and there set up my tent. A day or so later I had been joined by a roving band of unkempt and wretched Algonquins, whose one merit was that they were friendly. Their Chief, Ignace, whom I have already mentioned (I have forgotten his Indian name, which had in it more meaning than music) had led them to the shores of the river to fish, as was their custom in Summer, and since the fish were abundant this was their time of plenty and good humour. At the coming of Winter they would be forced to retire to the forest and seek their meat precariously by primitive methods of hunting, with starvation ever close at hand. To them, rain was nothing, being, in fact, the only manner of washing

that entered into their lives; to me it was most depressing, and as I huddled under cover day after day, I had viewed the weeping sky with a frowning visage. But now, as I stood at the wheel, the sky overhead was clear and bright and the sinking sun shone warm and cheerful, and the bad weather I had railed at was already a mere memory.

The captain stood beside me and related the incidents of the voyage. He told me how they had been driven out of their course by storms no less than three times, and in the third storm had had two men carried off by a great wave, and had well nigh lost the ship. But stirring as was his tale, I gave him less attention than he deserved; my interest was absorbed in a study of Mlle. de Chatillon and her cousin; the latter stood beside her, viewing the shores of the river and venturing an occasional remark, to which she gave scant reply, being apparently in a mood of detachment.

After a time the worthy skipper left me and went about his duties. When I was alone some impulse moved Mlle. de Chatillon to approach and ask me a question on a trivial matter,—it was in regard to the hour at which we should reach Quebec on the following day,—and I answered her.

As I have said, it was by the merest chance that I was on the ship,—it was a matter of trivial moment in regard to which she questioned me,—and such

being the case, it is a curious and noteworthy fact that of all the inhabitants of the country, I was the first who had speech with Mlle. de Chatillon upon her arrival in New France.

CHAPTER II

A FORTNIGHT later M. de Chatillon came to make enquiries of me in regard to the Vicomte de la Roux. This he did on the suggestion of my good friend P. Dufour. On his arrival M. de Chatillon greeted me affably, and seating himself beside me on a bench outside my dwelling, looked about him in leisurely fashion.

"You have a comfortable place here, M. Regnier," he said.

"It might be worse," I replied.

In fact, the prospect was a fair one. A settler in a rugged and sparsely peopled colony must give heed to the convenience of the spot where he is to locate himself, rather than to its beauty; but it is often the case that a man sentences himself and perhaps his descendants to dwell for many a year in the barest and ugliest of environments by reason of lack of vision in the first place. This mistake I had striven to avoid, and having had at the time a wide selection open to me, I had made choice of a fertile nook on the Isle of Orleans, open to the sun on the south and

sheltered from the north wind by the wooded rise of the Island. By dint of five years' work, I could now look with gratified pride on green pastures and tall grain rustling yellow in the August sunshine, and take comfort in the thought of the substantial barn behind the screen of oaks and maples which marked the course of the little brook beside my house.

"It might be much worse," he said, slowly and absently.

Judging that he had not come for the purpose of admiring my farm, I waited in silence for him to proceed.

"You have been in New France a long time, I am told," he said.

"Fifteen years."

"Père Dufour, of the Jesuit Mission, has directed me to you as one who might be able to furnish information with regard to a gentleman who is thought to have come to New France in the same year as that in which you arrived,—that is to say, fifteen years ago. His name was St. Étienne, and he bore the title of Vicomte de la Roux."

When a man has long made it his practice to refrain from the discussion of his private affairs, the habit of reticence grows upon him, and he constantly finds it easier to be silent rather than to speak. I filled my pipe and lit it with some deliberation.

"The name seems familiar," I said.

"He was a young man of good family, but without means, who is thought to have come to this country in the hope of retrieving his fortunes," said M. de Chatillon.

"In New France it is easier to hope for such a result than to accomplish it," I replied.

"If he had no greater commercial ability than his late father, who lost the estates of La Roux, there would be small chance of his prospering greatly in any quarter of the world," said M. de Chatillon.

"I gather from your words that the late Vicomte de la Roux,—the father of the man whom you seek, —was ruined due to his own incapacity."

"He was unpractical, and speculated beyond his means. Indeed, the ventures in which he lost so heavily also involved my own father and my father's brother. Fortunately, however, they were able to withstand their losses, and later recouped them," replied M. de Chatillon.

"Since the association of your family with the late Vicomte de la Roux was so hazardous and costly, I am at a loss to discern your reason for seeking his son."

When in good humour, M. de Chatillon was inclined to be communicative. "To tell you the truth, M. Regnier," he replied, "I myself do not know why

we are seeking him. In him, or his family, or his fortunes, I have, for my own part, not the slightest interest, and I think it would be the part of wisdom to forget him, the more so since his ancestral estates are now in the possession of Mademoiselle de Chatillon, my cousin, and should he hear of it and of her interest in him, he might be tempted to trump up some imaginary claim against her, which, though it must ultimately fail, would involve trouble and expense. This only I know, it is her wish that he be found."

"Then it is Mademoiselle de Chatillon who seeks him, and she has not told you her reason?"

"Precisely. If you can tell me he is no longer alive, it will suit me best of all," said M. de Chatillon with a yawn.

"But have you no slightest surmise in regard to her purpose?" I enquired, with incredulity.

He shrugged his shoulders. "Mlle. de Chatillon has dwelt for many years in the Château of la Roux and has acquired an interest in the ancient family of St. Étienne. It may be that she wishes to consult him about their history or their coat of arms. Mayhap she even has it in mind to extend him a helping hand in the low estate to which he has fallen,—though for my part I should strongly counsel her against doing so."

"Why?"

"He is more than likely to be ungrateful, and regard her kindness as an admission that in some way he has been robbed of the estate itself."

"Her kindness could scarcely justify that idea," I said, "that is, unless he entertains it already."

Again M. de Chatillon shrugged his shoulders. "Come, M. Regnier," he said, "what can you tell me about the Vicomte de la Roux? You said, if I mistake not, that the name is familiar to you."

"At the moment, I cannot tell you anything," I replied. "Fifteen years is a long time in a new country, and many come and go. I shall think it over and it may be you will hear from me later. "

He took leave of me with profuse politeness, and I watched his departing boat in perplexity. To the best of my belief, no one else in New France had the slightest idea what had become of the Vicomte de la Roux, and I had no desire to contribute to the public knowledge of the subject. On the other hand, here was a maiden seeking him,—young, and beautiful beyond words,—and it seemed churlish to refrain from coming to her assistance. Her motives were apparently friendly, possibly benevolent; the giver of charity is worthy of all honour and consideration. If a member of the family of De Chatillon showed incipient generosity, it should surely be encouraged!

Weighing this matter, I sat absorbed in study

while the sun sank behind the mountains, and the sky and river burned from yellow to orange and from orange to crimson. The more deeply I considered it, the more advisable it seemed to hold my peace, and permit Mlle. de Chatillon to conduct her search without my assistance for the time being.

CHAPTER III

In Spring, a garden is a place wherein to work; in Summer, a place wherein to rest; in Autumn, a place wherein to dream. When the eager, fresh green shoots of April have come to be dried up stalks, beaten and broken by the lashing rains of September, —when the blossoms of June and July have come to be empty seed-pods, dangling in the wind,—when the late flowers have paled of the purple and fire-red and golden that glowed in the slanting sunlight,— when growth has ceased, save for the straggling pansies that flaunt their banners to the bitter end,— ofttimes there comes an afternoon when the sky is cloudless and clear blue, and the air is still and warm and scented with romance, and Summer, lingering in her southward flight, smiles farewell.

On such an afternoon I sat and watched the smoke curl upward from my pipe. Dinner was over, and I might better have been back at my duties, but one cannot always work. I was lazily conning the question whether to remain at home or visit the town, when I heard voices at the landing-stage, and a moment later I greeted P. Dufour, who had come to see me, bringing with him M. de Chatillon and Mademoiselle.

It was now a month since M. de Chatillon had first visited me, and in the interval he had not heard from me nor I from him. Though he and his cousin had come out with the expedition of the Associates of Montreal (a visionary enterprise, now a matter of history, of which I had heard for the first time on the arrival of the expedition in New France) they were not members of the Association, nor were they lodged at St. Michel. M. de Chatillon was at the Inn, and Mademoiselle was with the Ursulines.

I brought out chairs for them, and we sat down together. It needed no great gift of divination to enable me to guess that they had come to enquire further whether I knew anything of the Vicomte de la Roux, and I decided to save time by coming directly to the subject of my own accord.

"Well," I said, "have you succeeded yet in learning aught of the Vicomte de la Roux?"

"We have found not the faintest trace of him," replied P. Dufour.

"It seems clear he never came to New France," said M. de Chatillon. "Had he done so, it is inconceivable that he could have escaped notice in this colony, where there is not so much as a Baron, and the Governor himself is but a Knight."

"You forget," said Mademoiselle, "he came not as a wealthy nobleman, but as a penniless adventurer.

It is not unlikely that he called himself M. de St. Étienne rather than Vicomte de la Roux."

"I fail to understand why he should drop his title," said M. de Chatillon. "It was his one remaining asset."

Mlle. de Chatillon did not answer his remark, but addressed herself to me. "In the vicissitudes which have beset this colony in the past fifteen years, the population of Quebec seems to have almost completely changed, and there are few indeed who, like you, M. Regnier, have been here that long," said she. "We seem to have undertaken a difficult search, and if, by urging your memory, you can call to mind the least information in regard to any young man bearing the name of St. Étienne or De la Roux, it will be of no little assistance to us."

She spoke wistfully, in a tone that bore traces of discouragement. Had I known then how noble, how resolute, how fearless, and yet how sweet and maidenly a spirit she possessed, I doubt whether I could have withstood her appeal; as it was I well nigh yielded to the mere outward charm which surrounded her wheresoever she went, the complete and compelling beauty which made her slightest request an almost irresistible command. For a moment I vacillated, hesitated, wondered whether I was justified in keeping my own counsel. To the best of my knowledge I

moved not a muscle, not an eyelash, yet her lightning intuition seized upon my hesitation as though I had stammered it aloud.

"You know something of him!" she declared, positively. "Come, Sir, tell me, I beg of you."

"Why do you seek the Vicomte de la Roux?" I enquired.

"That would be a long story, M. Regnier, of a private nature, and I should be glad to be spared the necessity of relating it," replied Mlle. de Chatillon, with a touch of reserve. "Of this I can assure you, that it would be to his benefit should I be successful in finding him."

"I gather that Mlle. de Chatillon has it in mind to relieve in a measure his financial necessities," explained M. de Chatillon.

Mademoiselle turned on her cousin a look which seemed to say how little she valued his willingness to interpret her words, but disdained further reply, preferring rather to press me for such information as I possessed. "Come, Sir," she said, "what do you know of the Vicomte de la Roux?"

"I am sorry, Mademoiselle, but anything you can learn from me will be of no value in finding M. de la Roux."

"What do you mean? Have you, after all, no recollection of his coming to New France?"

"So far as I am aware, if he came to New France, the fact of his having done so was known to none but himself."

"Then you have not heard of him nor met him?"

"The name was known to me in France, as it was to many. I have not met him, nor have I heard the name mentioned, since I left France, by any save M. de Chatillon and yourself."

"Then you do not think he is in New France?"

"I do not think you will find him here," I replied.

"So you see it is as I expected," said M. de Chatillon. "M. Regnier knows nothing whatever of the Vicomte de la Roux."

Mademoiselle made no reply, but gazed absently across the water at the promontory of Quebec.

"Chut!" said Père Dufour, "This is too bad! I have told Mlle. de Chatillon again and again that if anyone here could help her it would be you. And since you know nothing of the Vicomte de la Roux——"

"However," said Mademoiselle, "I am satisfied that M. Regnier does, in fact, know something of the Vicomte de la Roux."

"But Mademoiselle!" expostulated the Jesuit, "You surely cannot,—you surely do not mean to intimate that,—that is to say, that M. Regnier is not——"

"In other words," interrupted M. de Chatillon, with a touch of malice, "that M. Regnier is not telling the truth."

If that was not Mlle. de Chatillon's meaning, she did not take the trouble to deny it.

"For my part," continued M. de Chatillon, "I think M. Regnier has answered our questions in a plain and straightforward manner, and his statements deserve all credence."

"This is preposterous!" exclaimed Père Dufour. "M. Regnier is my trusted friend of long standing! You could do him no greater injustice than to believe him guilty of withholding information that would help you in your search."

Mlle. de Chatillon turned on me a gaze that was neither friendly nor hostile,—a gaze of dispassionate, searching inquisition.

"Do I do you an injustice?" she enquired.

"By no means, Mademoiselle," I replied. "Yet I assure you that in all that I have said I have told you nothing but the truth."

"I have come on a long journey, and, to me, an arduous journey, to seek this gentleman," she said. "I have found disappointment everywhere. Will you not help me?"

But my moment of hesitation had passed, and her appeal left me unmoved. "I am sorry, Mademoi-

selle," I said, "any information which is to be obtained from me will not help you."

If the eyes of Mlle. de Chatillon had been dispassionate they were now no longer so, and meeting them as best I could, I perceived in them a rising tide of imperious, cold displeasure.

"Rest assured, Sir," she said, "I shall prosecute my search for the Vicomte de la Roux in the face of all opposition until I find him or learn what has befallen him."

"If at any time I can be of service, pray do not hesitate to call upon me," I said.

"I thank you, Sir. I am not like to ask your assistance again," she replied, and with the coldest of bows she turned her back upon me and walked toward the waiting boat, followed by her embarrassed and furtively apologetic companions.

When their boat disappeared beyond the bend of the shore, I went back to my work.

CHAPTER IV

THE Winter of that year was long and cold, and the colonists of Montreal doubtless had their share of hardship. Akin to the weather in respect of its coldness was the treatment they received at the hands of the Governor, who viewed with little favour the proposed establishment of a settlement within his province, but not subject to his authority. By the end of January he had come to an open break with M. de Maisonneuve, and had gone to the length of putting one of his men in irons for a trivial offence. Indeed, it was said he would have placed M. de Maisonneuve himself in confinement for disrespect to his authority could he have secured sufficient evidence of certain remarks that were known to have been made. This much is sure, there was scant love between the two.

Having little to call me abroad, I stayed for the most part at home, and applied myself to the affairs of the farm, which were not very pressing during the Winter months, and left plenty of time to sit before the fire. It was my custom at this season to devote considerable thought to making plans for the

following Summer. I was successful as a farmer, and, as is often the case, success had increased my interest to a point where I loved the work for its own sake,—the more so, perhaps, since in my youth I had had neither training in such a vocation nor inclination towards it.

I had little of which to complain. I enjoyed rude health. My men were faithful, and, when vigorously driven, industrious. I liked books, and they were at my hand. I liked occasional leisure, and it was mine. I liked smoking tobacco, and there was none to say me nay.

Being thus comfortably situated, it was with annoyance that I found myself in an unsettled frame of mind in consequence of the advent of Mlle. de Chatillon, and her intention to pursue her search by accompanying the visionaries of the expedition to Montreal on their perilous enterprise.

This business imposed upon me a peculiar problem, both perplexing and embarrassing. As I turned it over in my mind one morning, a messenger came to my door and informed me that the Governor desired my presence. While he sipped the glass of cordial I set before him, I questioned him as to what M. de Montmagny wanted of me, but he could not enlighten me. However, I welcomed the summons, being tired of inaction, and when we had taken a

hasty meal we set forth. It was very cold, but still, and we reached the town in about an hour and a half, and climbed up to the fort. On my arrival, I was called into the room where the Governor sat with a chart outspread on the table before him. I guessed that he wished to take advantage of my knowledge of the country, and in this I was correct. He had a plan for the location of a new fort in a strategic position further up the river, to block the inroads of the Indians from the south, and I gave him such information as my memory afforded. When I left him, it was still early, and I sauntered towards the stores of the Company with the half formed idea of making one or two purchases. But the Company was not destined to reap its usual exorbitant rate of profit from my custom at that juncture, for on the way I fell in with M. de Chatillon.

"Come and walk with me for a minute or so, friend Regnier," he said. "I have something to say to you."

Though I had little desire for his company, I reflected that I was in no hurry, and might as well hear what he had to say, the more so as I was curious to know what he had in mind. I turned and accompanied him.

"I am told," he said, "that you are one of the most seasoned and skillful voyageurs of this country."

"I travelled widely at one time," I replied, "but now I am settled on my farm."

"So I am informed. But I should like, if possible, to persuade you to leave it for a time."

"To what purpose?" I enquired.

"That you may accompany the expedition to the Island of Montreal."

"I have no interest in the expedition to the Island of Montreal."

"Neither have I," replied M. de Chatillon. "Nevertheless, I find myself obliged to join it, whether I will or not."

"Why? Are you not your own master?"

"My cousin, Mlle. de Chatillon, is determined to go, and I must escort her."

"If you were to remain behind she would not lack protection."

"Protection!" he exclaimed scornfully. "A mere handful of men, without experience! As her cousin, I must go. It is to strengthen the party that I would induce you to go too."

"What is the purpose of Mlle. de Chatillon in making this voyage? Does she look to find the Vicomte de la Roux in the wilderness?"

"I do not know," he said. "Her mind is quite made up. Between ourselves, she is seldom guided by my advice."

I surmised that in this latter respect, at least, she showed fair judgment, but said nothing.

"Well," he asked, "what do you think of it?"

"It does not appeal to me," I said. "My farm would suffer by my absence."

"You have men to work it," he persisted.

I shook my head.

"I should make it well worth your while," he urged. "You have but to name your price."

"I am my own employer," I said. "My services are not for sale."

His face showed his disappointment. "Then you absolutely refuse?" he said.

"I have not said so."

"But how then?" he asked.

"I may go of my own accord," I said. "It depends upon circumstances."

With an access of good humour he took me familiarly by the arm, and at this moment we turned a corner and came face to face with P. Dufour and Mlle. de Chatillon.

It is a strange anomaly (except perhaps to a misogynist, who might call it an example of the fitness of things) that there is no garb more becoming to a beautiful woman than such as is composed of the skins of those fierce, carnivorous animals which provide our richest furs; the charming effect is not les-

sened by the touch of brighter color that Winter brings to her cheeks.

P. Dufour greeted me with warmth. Mlle. de Chatillon bowed coldly to her cousin and ignored my presence.

M. de Chatillon gave no apparent heed to her disfavor. "See!" he exclaimed, "I am in the act of gaining a recruit. I have been endeavouring to induce M. Regnier to come with us up the river, and he tells me that he may perhaps do so."

"That is good news," replied P. Dufour. "We shall welcome you, my son."

"I have not yet arrived at a decision," I said. "But you say 'we.' Are you, too, to be of the party, Father?"

"Most assuredly," he declared. "If for no other reason than to serve as chaplain to Mlle. de Chatillon. You also, M. Regnier, must surely be influenced to join us by the thought that it will afford her additional safety. Is it not so, Mademoiselle?"

"It is quite unnecessary," replied Mademoiselle with hauteur. "I am content with the protection of M. de Maisonneuve and his men."

"I have no desire to place Mlle. de Chatillon under an unwelcome obligation," I said. "If I decide to go, it will be for reasons of my own."

P. Dufour shivered. "It grows colder," he said,

with a whimsical twinkle in his eye. "If we remain here longer in conversation, we shall freeze! Come, Mademoiselle, let us resume our walk."

They passed on, and with a nod of scant courtesy, I left M. de Chatillon and turned my steps homeward.

CHAPTER V

To one who has been accustomed to entertain the notion that he is his own master, it is vexatious to realize that his future movements depend on the whims of others. I had no sympathy with those who proposed to set up a religious settlement on the Island of Montreal, and found it difficult to contemplate their folly with patience. I grieved to think of the dangers to which P. Dufour would be exposed; but he was a man of fortitude, who had for years sought rather than avoided martyrdom, and, much as I liked him, it was not for me to interfere with the development of his plans. I had no place in the spiritual plane in which he lived and moved and had his being. For M. de Chatillon, I cared still less than I did for his money. As for Mademoiselle, her words and her manner had made it quite clear how little she desired my company. I knew M. de Maisonneuve to be brave and resourceful, and his men seemed to be stout fellows. The party would be well armed and amply provisioned, and I chid myself for the conceit which led me to think that my presence or absence would

matter a denier to their safety. It was, in truth, absurd to consider going with them.

Nevertheless, consider it I did, as I trudged homeward through the gathering darkness, and as I thoughtfully ate my solitary supper; the immediate outcome of my cogitations was that I built up a roaring fire of logs on the hearth, and put on a pair of slippers, and opened a bottle of wine, and lit my pipe, and set myself down in my armchair with an old romance in my hands, and so remained until a late hour, being minded to enjoy while I could the modest degree of comfort which events were conspiring to snatch away from me.

To the world at large, the course of a man's deliberations is of less interest than their outcome, and so, to sum the matter up, when April had come and gone, and the ice floes, jostling and swirling under the watery sky, had flocked away to the sea, and all growing things were bursting into fragrant, fair, green life, I consigned the care of my island home to Pierre and Emile and Jules, and taking with me André Picot, set sail one morning for St. Michel.

As we passed slowly up the river, my thoughts were not of the most pleasant. In fact, I was inwardly railing at myself and my folly in leaving so fair and congenial a domicile,—for what? André, too, was glum, not liking the company in which he was

to travel. By nature he was profane to a degree that would disgrace a sailor, and I had sternly warned him that should he utter so much as one "Sacré" from beginning to end of the present venture, he would feel the weight of my hand.

The morning, however, was bright and the breeze stimulating, and ere long our spirits began to rise, so that by the time we reached the place of the grand embarkation we were in a fairly cheerful frame of mind. Though all was bustle and confusion, our arrival did not escape notice, and P. Dufour came to greet us. When he heard what my purpose was, his gratification was manifest, and he carried me off to M. de Maisonneuve, who welcomed me warmly. I met him with the more interest since I had known him years before in the army in Holland, but he did not recognize me (due, no doubt, to my overgrown beard) and I did not remind him of our former acquaintance.

It still lacked some three hours of noon when the Governor arrived with his suite and the ladies of the expedition. He saluted M. de Maisonneuve stiffly, and made his way toward the pinnace that was to serve as our flagship. I learned that it was his intention to come with us on behalf of the Company to formally deliver the island to the Associates of Montreal, and the knowledge brought me little com-

fort, since I had neglected to observe the formality of asking his consent to my leaving my home, feeling fairly sure from what I had heard that he would not grant it. I edged toward my own craft with the idea of keeping out of sight, if possible, until we should be well on our way. At first I had hope of putting this device into successful execution, since he stood with his back to me, in conversation with Mlle. de Chatillon, but Mademoiselle was herself the cause of my detection, for she noticed my presence with none the less interest that she showed no inclination to recognize it. Following her gaze with his eyes, the Governor espied me, and called me sharply to him. I approached reluctantly and stood at attention before him.

"Well!" he said. "What brings you here this morning?"

I could easily divine from his tone and expression that I was in for a bad quarter of an hour. He was obviously in an evil humour, and here was I, a convenient culprit upon whom to vent his wrath. I forced a cheerful countenance and informed him that it was my purpose to sail with M. de Maisonneuve.

"Indeed!" he remarked, tartly. "And by whose permission?"

It was an awkward question. I looked about for inspiration and saw that a number of people were

gathering around us, their attention attracted by the sharpness of his tone.

"I took your Excellency's permission for granted," I said.

His Excellency was a pious man, not given to violent language, but his wrath overcame him. "Ten thousand thunders!" he cried. "You impudent scoundrel! You took my permission for granted! I shall have you put in irons for this!"

Again I looked around, and saw M. de Chatillon and M. de Maisonneuve both gathering breath to interfere, while Mlle. de Chatillon leaned forward, her lips a little open and a flush of excitement on her cheek. For some reason, my blood boiled up within me more suddenly than was usual. I took a step toward M. de Montmagny and faced him more defiantly than was altogether seemly.

"You do ill to call me impudent, and a scoundrel, M. de Montmagny," I said. "As for putting me in irons,—that would be a strange reward for the years I have served in this colony under you, and under M. de Champlain before you,—a strange reward, that I should be treated like a runaway slave because I have failed to obtain your august permission to go with M. de Maisonneuve."

M. de Maisonneuve seized upon the mention of his name to break into the conversation. "Come, your

Excellency!" he said, "is it such a crime that this man chooses for a time to cast in his lot with ours?"

The interruption, though doubtless fortunate for me, served not to abate, but only to transfer the ire of the Governor. "And you, Sir! And you! Is it nothing, think you, that you abuse our hospitality by enticing our settlers away?"

"You forget yourself!" answered Maisonneuve, icily.

The two dignitaries glared at each other in a manner that gave reason for fear lest the smouldering fire of ill-will between them might at last break into flame. If M. de Chatillon had intended to come to my rescue, he was now of a different mind, and discreetly held his peace. It was the voice of P. Dufour, —calm, benignant,—which at this critical moment fell upon our ears.

"Your Excellency," he said, "your wrath is justified, but misdirected. It is I who am the culprit."

The Governor regarded him with astonishment.

"Not content with leaving you myself, I went so far as to urge M. Regnier to come also. No doubt he thought that under such circumstances it was quite in order for him to do so."

I would have contradicted him, for my temper was still up, but he silenced me with an authoritative gesture, and stood calmly facing M. de Montmagny,

mildly but confidently personifying all that is best in that historic organization which (sometimes arrogantly enough) claims superiority to the power of governors and princes.

Moreover, he was loved by the Governor, as by all good men, and his intercession was effectual.

"Gentlemen," he said, "this is a high and noble undertaking, and harsh words and ill feeling are not seemly at its inception. Let us rather beg Père Vimont to ask a blessing ere we set sail."

Mollified, though far from pleased, M. de Montmagny dismissed me with a curt nod, and during the psalm that followed the prayer of P. Vimont, I retired to my boat, glad to have escaped so easily from the altercation.

CHAPTER VI

The task of founding a settlement is one that demands both industry and application, and under the inspiring leadership of M. de Maisonneuve, neither was lacking. All hands worked with a will, felling trees and hewing and transporting logs from the surrounding woods. From morning until night the chips flew merrily and the frightened squirrels scampered chattering away as the trees came toppling down. As fast as the timber was dragged across the meadow to the site of Ville Marie it was utilized in the erection of palisade and buildings, and for many weeks the bustle and activity of this work left little time for moping.

The end of July was marked by the advent of a band of Huron Indians on their annual excursion to Quebec. They were accompanied by two Jesuit Fathers and a number of converts, whose object it was to obtain supplies for the Huron Mission. Though M. de Maisonneuve urged the Jesuits to stop and rest for a day or two, they could not do so, being obliged to hurry on with their Indian allies, and they left in

haste, with a promise that they would endeavour to stay overnight on their return journey.

I had left behind me the assembly gathered on the shore to watch their departing canoes, and was on the way back to my work when M. de Chatillon overtook me. He wore an expression of moody vexation.

"You have travelled much," he said, abruptly. "Have you ever visited the Huron Mission?"

"Once, years ago, shortly after it was first established," I replied.

"Is it far from here?"

"About three hundred leagues."

"Is the journey an arduous one?"

"Arduous enough," I said. "Why do you ask?"

"Mlle. de Chatillon has just now informed me that she proposes to join these missionaries and Indians on their return passage."

"I doubt if they will consent to take her with them," I said.

"I hope they will not. But there is no folly too extreme for some of these people,—and no argument that will prevail with a woman whose mind is once made up."

When he had left me, I fell into reflection on the news he had given me, which was no more to my liking than it had been to his. I could see that his patience was sorely tried by the vagaries of his fair

cousin and that he viewed with little relish the hazardous ventures into which he seemed likely to be drawn by persistence in his chosen office of companion and protector to that unthankful damsel. How far he would go I did not know, nor did I much care, my thoughts being occupied with the weightier problem of how to check, if it were possible, this wild goose chase. But it was through no machination of mine that the plans of Mlle. de Chatillon were for the time being brought to naught, but through a very grievous disaster; on their return journey the missionaries and their companions were fallen upon and overwhelmed by Iroquois among the islands of Lake St. Peter, and only a few scattered Hurons reached us to bring the dismal news.

Albeit, Mademoiselle did not yield to destiny without putting forth an effort, nor was I entirely without a hand in the matter. The day after we received word of the calamity, while the survivors still tarried with us in hope of the appearance of other stragglers, P. Dufour sought me out and called me to one side to talk in private.

"I come to you on behalf of Mlle. de Chatillon," he said.

"She could choose no worthier emissary," I replied. "What is the nature of your errand?"

"Knowing of your proficiency as a traveller in these

wilds, she would like you to be one of a party to escort her to the Huron mission."

"What? Is she still determined to set forth, after what has happened?"

"If she can secure your assistance," he replied.

"You amaze me! I admire her determination, but am puzzled at her choosing upon me."

"Why should she not? Whom could she select more deserving of her confidence for such an employment?"

"However deserving of her confidence, I have not always seemed to enjoy it."

The Jesuit chuckled. "Lest I inspire you with vanity, it is well, perhaps, to inform you that her choice of you is, in a manner, unavoidable."

"Unavoidable?"

"It is this way," he explained. "Mlle. de Chatillon wishes to pursue her search to the furthest outpost of New France. Having set herself the task of finding the Vicomte de la Roux, she desires to proceed with as little delay as possible. Already she has been in this country well nigh a year. Should she not go on now, there is small chance of her being able to do so until next Spring, at earliest. She has therefore laid the matter before M. de Maisonneuve, with the object of obtaining his approval and assistance."

"Heavens!" I said. "She cannot surely meditate travelling alone with these redskins!"

"Not quite alone. But with three or four well armed Frenchmen also, it might be possible to travel in a fair degree of safety. With this idea in mind, Mlle. de Chatillon has asked M. de Maisonneuve if there are any such whom he can spare for the purpose. But M. de Maisonneuve has explained that his duty and the duty of those whom he brought with him from France is primarily bound up in this settlement. He concedes, however, that there are four men here who are not obligated to the same extent,—to wit, M. de Chatillon, yourself, your man André Picot and myself."

"What of M. de Chatillon?"

"He has not yet been asked."

"And you, Father?"

"Since it has pleased God in His wisdom to permit my dear friends and comrades to be taken captive or slain by the Iroquois, and since the mission is in need of the supplies they were to carry, I shall assuredly take advantage of the opportunity to accompany the party if one be formed."

"Which depends on the decision of André and myself?"

"Precisely. Or rather, on your own decision, since André will be guided by you."

"Such being the case," I replied, "the answer is not far to seek. I shall not go."

The Jesuit shook his head reprovingly. "I hope," he said, "that you are not moved by a feeling of resentment against Mlle. de Chatillon."

"By no means. Her lack of friendliness towards me makes it easier to meet her request with refusal. But I should refuse in any event."

He fell into thoughtful silence.

"I feared you would not consent," he said at length, "and I told her so. But she asked me, if I should fail in my errand, to bring you with me, that she might speak to you in person. Will you grant me that much?"

"To what purpose? I do not desire an argument on the subject."

"Do not frown so, M. Regnier. It would be discourteous to refuse her an interview."

There was truth in what he said. I picked up my hat and joined him, and we threaded our way in silence, through the cluster of huts and tents, to the abode that was occupied by the ladies. We were met at the door by Mlle. Mance, who ushered us into a reception room, and bade us be seated while she announced our arrival.

We had not long to wait the coming of Mlle. de Chatillon. To her P. Dufour explained that since I

was not disposed to fall in with her plans, he had brought me, in accordance with her wish.

That she found it distasteful to solicit my assistance a second time, I had no doubt; but her deportment was admirable.

"I do not forget, M. Regnier," she began, "that on the few occasions on which we have met, I have given you no cause to wish to do me a service. To say now that I have done you an injustice would savour of cajolery. Père Dufour has assured me that you are brave, honest and resourceful, and the fact that I am willing to entrust myself to your protection is evidence that I accept his judgment of your merits."

She paused, but I made no reply. She turned to the Jesuit.

"Has M. Regnier told you the reason of his unwillingness?" she asked.

"No, Mademoiselle, I did not question him, since I thought you would prefer to learn his reason from his own lips."

"Then tell me, M. Regnier, why is it that you say 'No'?"

"The adventure does not appeal to me, Mademoiselle."

"Perhaps Père Dufour has not mentioned to you that I am prepared to pay an unusually large sum for

the service I ask of you. Does the question of money enter into your thoughts?"

"No, Mademoiselle. Since I am resolved not to go, the amount offered does not interest me."

"But what can have led you into such a resolve?"

"I do not care to be responsible for your exposing yourself to the hazards and hardships of the journey, Mademoiselle."

"But you would not be responsible!" exclaimed Mademoiselle, indignantly. "It is I who should be responsible!"

"Is it not a fact that you cannot obtain the Governor's permission to go without me?" I asked.

"Unfortunately,—yes," she replied.

"So that it is for me to decide whether you go or not. Since the decision rests with me, the responsibility rests upon me. And since, in my opinion, it is wiser that you should not go, I cannot bring myself to grant your request."

In the eyes of Mlle. de Chatillon I could see the flash of the quick and fiery words that struggled within her for utterance. Her silence was more eloquent than speech. When, at last, she answered me, her voice was quiet and steady, though her face was white with wrath.

"Since you make no secret of your determination to defeat my purpose, I shall not humiliate myself

still further by continuing to discuss it with you. I thank you for granting me this interview."

With an icy bow she dismissed me, and I left them and returned to my work in a mood of profound dissatisfaction.

CHAPTER VII

From the first, P. Dufour had claimed that the Mission of the Associates of Montreal was under the especial protection of Divine Providence. If, in the beginning, evidence was lacking to support his argument, it was supplied, to his satisfaction at least, by our continued immunity from Indian attacks as Summer wore on and gave place to Autumn. It was a notable advantage to us to be allowed to erect our first rude fortifications unnoticed and unmolested. A few wretched Algonquins appeared from time to time, and, enjoying our hospitality, passed on to their fellows the news of our presence, but it was not until the end of October that the Iroquois stumbled upon us.

I had good reason to remember the occasion of their first coming. Late one afternoon, André and I were nearing the settlement on our return from a hunting expedition, when my thoughts were interrupted by the sound of his voice.

"See there, M'sieur!" he said. "There is Père Dufour, who beckons to us."

My eyes followed the direction he indicated, and

at the far end of a glade I saw the Jesuit in company with a lady whom on closer scrutiny I perceived to be Mlle de Chatillon. I hesitated to join them, since Mademoiselle had for the past three months ignored me more pointedly than ever, but they were directly in our path, and we could not turn aside without openly avoiding them. I advanced, and was greeted by the priest with a jovial enquiry as to what luck we had met.

"Fair," I replied. "As you see, we do not come home empty-handed."

He glanced approvingly at the score of partridges and the fat buck we carried between us.

"If we all did our work as well as the huntsmen of Ville Marie de Montreal have done theirs this Summer there would be little of which to complain," he remarked benevolently.

"You flatter us," I said. "Game is so plentiful and so tame that one comes to feel more like a butcher than a huntsman."

"No calling is unworthy, if worthily pursued," moralized P. Dufour.

"You must be weary, carrying that burden," he continued. "Will you not pause and rest a few minutes?"

He was an indomitable peacemaker, but even had I been in a mood to take advantage of his mediation,

the hostility that displayed itself in the averted face of Mlle. de Chatillon was sufficient intimation of the futility of doing so.

"It is growing late," I said. "We must hurry on. You, too, would do well to return soon."

"We shall follow you closely," rejoined the Jesuit.

André and I resumed our course down the ravine. The air had that soft, warm languor that often prevails in New France in late Autumn, and we trudged along slowly. We had almost reached the edge of the meadow which surrounds the settlement when suddenly the silence was broken by the crackling of dried herbage, and an Indian rushed past us in frantic haste, followed by another and another, until we had counted ten. One of them paused on noticing us, and seeing he was of a friendly tribe, I called to him to ask from whom he fled.

"Hodenosaunee!" he replied (this being their name for the Indians of the Long House, whom we call Iroquois) then, seeing we were but two, he took to his heels once more, to make for the protection of the fort.

I had been meditating on the recklessness that led unarmed, defenceless people to venture so far from safety in a neighbourhood where the woods might at any moment be alive with screeching enemies,—and

here was the evil thing come to pass! By a common impulse, we dropped our load.

"André," I exclaimed, "run to the Commander, and bring a rescue party! You know where to look for us!"

He hesitated. "But you, M'sieur,—am I to leave you to turn back alone?"

"Do as I bid you!" I said.

He obeyed without further argument, while I rushed headlong back toward the spot where we had left P. Dufour and Mlle. de Chatillon. It was fortunate for them that I arrived when I did; I found them in perilous plight. They had seen the fleeing Algonquins, and inferring the approach of enemies, had set out to run for safety, but by the unluckiest of chances the priest had wrenched his ankle in endeavouring to surmount a fallen tree, so that the best he could do was to crawl feebly and slowly out of the path of the pursuers. He was imploring Mademoiselle to leave him behind, to which she answered not a word, but with set face and straining muscles endeavoured to drag him into the concealment of a near-by clump of cedars.

There was no time for flight, and little enough to get in hiding; we could already hear the yells of the Iroquois. I lifted him bodily, and hurried to the spot which had been picked out by the quick eye of

Mlle. de Chatillon,—a poor refuge, but it served our turn, else this story had never been told.

There we lay, and watched them troop by, a score or more in number, some of them with firearms, obtained, no doubt, from the Dutch. P. Dufour, as became his cloth, fell to silent invocation of a Higher power. Mlle. de Chatillon crouched in a convenient recess and looked with alert eyes to see what might appear. Judging that in this emergency the lack of cordiality between us might be temporarily ignored, I leaned over and asked her in a whisper whether she could use a pistol. She replied in the affirmative, and I handed her one of mine, with an injunction to reserve her fire until the latest possible moment.

As the minutes dragged on, I found myself absently noting the beauty of the surroundings. The lower part of the valley was carpeted with grass and dotted with clumps of cedar. Across from us, the steep incline was hidden by dark firs and pines, amongst which a tall maple rose like a flame of yellow fire. Through the gorgeous scarlet and orange of another the evening sunlight fell in glowing radiance on the forest floor, and over all the blue haze of October cast the glamour of a dream.

The yelling had ceased. Ville Marie de Montreal had been discovered by the Iroquois, and there could be no more wandering in the woods.

A long interval of silence, and we heard a shot, followed by a volley, and the welcome shouts of Frenchmen. The fusillade grew nearer and nearer, and anon the Iroquois reappeared, taking cover among the cedars in their retreat, and firing at their pursuers in the desultory manner of redskins. I could not see that either party was doing much execution, but my attention was soon occupied by more urgent matters; a great ugly fellow came running to avail himself of the shelter we had ourselves appropriated. Owing to his ignorance of our presence there, I was able to spring upon him and drive my dagger through his neck before he perceived his danger. By this sanguinary incident I fell heir to his loaded musket (a worthless weapon, of poor material and worse workmanship) but I had no leisure to examine it at the moment; a number of other Indians saw us and converged upon us at once. I discharged my pieces with good effect as they came up, but failed to check them, and was thrown back on using an empty musket as a club. There is no question that we should have been promptly killed or carried off to a worse fate had it not been for the magnificent courage of Mlle. de Chatillon. The Chief of the Iroquois had seen her standing behind me, and, leaving the mèlée, edged his way round to seize her; but she stood with white face and blazing eyes, calmly

awaiting the vile ruffian, and when he was at the point of springing upon her she raised her pistol, steadily, deliberately, and shot him dead.

Then followed a strange scene, not unusual in Indian warfare; in their anxiety to secure and carry off the body of their Chief, the remaining Iroquois seemed to forget our existence, and we stood unmolested while they picked him up and fled away before the advancing rescue party.

The Governor surveyed the evidence of the fight, and turned to Mlle. de Chatillon, in whose hand the pistol still smoked.

"Mademoiselle, I salute your courage!" he said. "Were you a man, I should make you the Lieutenant of the garrison."

She had not yet found her voice, and stared at him dumbly. We made a stretcher for P. Dufour, and returned through the gathering darkness, profoundly thankful that the day's adventure had resulted in so little harm to anyone but the Indians, who (except from the ultra-hopeful viewpoint of the missionaries) did not matter.

CHAPTER VIII

During the night rain fell, that by morning had turned to snow, and when I looked out of my tent at an early hour the ground was covered with soft slush; thereupon I thanked Providence that my duties did not require me to be up and about (it being Sunday) and returned to bed with all the good will in the world, to make up for a week of scanty sleep by a forenoon passed in agreeable alternation of slumber and drowsy reflection. Early rising, especially in Winter, is at the best a necessary evil; I have ever contemplated with pity those whose sense of duty, or of the fitness of things,—the major importance of minor virtues,—drives them to rise betimes on all occasions, and thus, to my mind, robs them of one of the simple pleasures of life. In this view I could never bring P. Dufour to agree with me, nor would he even listen to my arguments with patience; Winter and Summer, he rose at four, and I verily believe the sleepier he was, the more virtue he found in this form of spiritual flagellation.

The hospital was not yet built, and P. Dufour had

been taken to the house occupied by the ladies and their maid Charlotte, where there was a room set apart in the meantime for the accommodation of patients. It was a far from pretentious abode, though substantial in comparison with the other structures of our community, having good doors and windows and a well built chimney. But when I entered it that afternoon to enquire how the Jesuit did, I could not fail to remark what an art is possessed by women of taste and refinement to make a house into a home. Stepping from the chill, gray damp of a foggy afternoon into the cheerful glow of the fire which blazed on the broad hearth, I seemed to have entered a different world. The soft rugs on the dark-stained floor, the figured tapestries which concealed the bareness of the walls, the curtains which decked the high windows, the silver candlesticks on the mantel shelf, the embroidered drape on the table,—all these things breathed an atmosphere that was foreign to the life of a rough pioneer, and caused my thoughts to wander curiously as I waited for Charlotte to announce my advent to P. Dufour. I could not but sympathize with the Ursulines at Quebec; it was well known that when Mme. de la Peltrie had left them in her newborn enthusiasm for the mission at Ville Marie de Montreal, she had carried away with her the choicest of her donations to the convent.

The thought had arisen in my mind that I was in a different world, and a moment later I was sure of it. Gone were the frowning mountain, the cluster of comfortless cabins and tents, the bleak and restless river,—gone were the snow and the rain and the mist, and I was in sunny, far-away France, in the drawing room of some noble château, while before me, in the witching enchantment woven of youth and beauty, with laughter on her lips and in her eyes, stood the gentle daughter of an ancient house.

No man, however rough and plain, could be insensible to such a vision. But her gayety was not for me; even as I glimpsed the flash of sunshine she brought with her out of the presence of P. Dufour, her mirth faded, and she regarded me with an expression but little kinder than had been her wont.

"I must thank you, M. Regnier," she said, "for coming to our rescue yesterday. It was most bravely done, and beyond doubt saved our lives."

Her words were gracious, but her attitude seemed rather to say "Since you helped me, I must thank you, but I should have greatly preferred to have been helped by someone other than you."

Not wishing to argue the question (and conceding that she was, on the face of it, not without cause to dislike me) I contented myself with referring in laudatory terms to her own exploit, to which she

listened with evident distaste, and ushered me into the improvized hospital ward where P. Dufour enjoyed such pleasant nursing.

As she retired and left us together, the Jesuit smiled a meditative smile. "A most interesting and amiable young lady," he said. "Her beauty caused more than a little stir among the young gentlemen of Quebec."

"I do not doubt it."

"For my own part, I confess I have become quite devoted to Mademoiselle,—not the less that she is kind-hearted enough to honour with her friendship a weather-beaten old priest like myself."

"It speaks well for her judgment that she chooses for her friend so worthy and valiant a soldier of the Cross."

He checked me with a gesture of expostulation.

"She took a deep interest in the building of our new church at Quebec, and we often went together to look at it. And I would tell her of the Indians, and the woods, and the great lake of the Hurons, and the towns of the Tobacco nation and the nation of the Cat,—their base, misguided superstitions, their cruel customs, their poverty and wretchedness——" the Jesuit sighed.

"No doubt, like yourself, she yearns to convert and civilize them."

"Her heart is full of pity for them, and I am sure she is in sympathy with our missions, but, as you know, that is not the reason of her visit to New France."

"I know that she seeks the Vicomte de la Roux,—but why she should seek him so earnestly to such trifling purpose, I cannot guess."

"Why do you say 'To such trifling purpose'?" asked P. Dufour.

"Is it not, in fact, trifling, to seek this man that she may perchance induce him to accept some paltry largesse in alleviation of the loss of that wealth of which it forms an inconsiderable part? If the fortune is now rightfully hers, the Vicomte de la Roux has no claim upon it, and could not accept of her charity without loss of his self-respect. If it is not rightfully hers, she can hardly hope to salve her conscience by adding insult to injury."

The Jesuit shook his head. "Your conjecture is strangely at fault," he said. "You could not well be more wide of the mark."

"If, without violation of confidence, you could tell me the facts in regard to her search for the Vicomte de la Roux, I should deem it a favour," I said.

"I am not bound to secrecy, though Mademoiselle would prefer that her affairs should not become the subject of common gossip. But since I know you to

be a man of discretion, and silent by nature, I feel justified in enlightening you."

"I shall not make it a subject of gossip," I said.

"To begin, then, at the beginning. As you are from Auvergne, it is probably known to you that the family of St. Étienne has been one of the oldest and most renowned of the families of that province. Though their wealth has not been vast, it has been sufficient, and from generation to generation they have built up a tradition of nobility that adds lustre to their name.

"To his misfortune, the late Vicomte de la Roux, the father of the young man whom we seek, came to be acquainted with two brothers of the name of De Chatillon, of whom the elder is the father of the M. de Chatillon we have with us, and the younger was the father of Mademoiselle. Though of no great family, they were both reputed to be wealthy,—the elder by inheritance, and the younger by a rich marriage which he made with a lady of the famous and powerful family of La Tour. But the graces which had made him acceptable to her were external only; he neglected her and squandered her dowry, and she died at an early age, leaving the one daughter, who, through her mother, is also, as it happens, distantly connected with the family of St. Étienne."

"When her father had come to the end of his re-

sources, he fell back on the bounty of his brother, thus creating a situation pleasant to neither of them; the elder was not a cheerful giver, and the younger chafed at the stinginess of the doles he received, to such a degree that from a spendthrift he was changed into something of a miser. In this exigency, it seems, they looked about for someone whom they might plunder, and their attention fell upon the Vicomte de la Roux.

"The late M. de la Roux was neither avaricious nor a simpleton, to be gulled by the most usual artifice of the swindler, which is to promise great profit at small cost with little risk; but it must be remembered that the two brothers were regarded as men of substance and integrity, so that his suspicions were not aroused by the mere fact of their approaching him. They proposed a joint venture in which they succeeded in interesting him, not only on account of the reasonable prospect of profit which it seemed to offer, but also by appeals to his friendship, since his assistance would be of advantage to them. Once launched, the enterprise grew by rapid stages, and at each stage of its growth M. de la Roux had to choose between losing what he had contributed or contributing further, until his whole fortune was finally involved. It is an old story, and perhaps I tire you with these details."

"By no means!" I exclaimed. "I find it more interesting than you think!"

"Needless to say, the undertaking was a failure; but so skillfully was it conducted by his two dishonest partners that even after they had ruined him, M. de la Roux was under the impression that they also had lost heavily. Their plans were promoted by his death, which followed soon afterward. The son had substantial possessions in his own right which came to him from his mother, but the honour of his father and of his house was dearer to him than these, and without hesitation he gave them that his father's debts might be satisfied, and he might die in peace; and finding himself alone in the world, with naught but an empty title, he shortly disappeared, leaving no trace save a remark he is said to have made to one of his friends, that he thought of going to New France. He added to his other distinctions the reputation of being the best swordsman in Auvergne.

"Since the chief losers were thus conveniently out of the way, there were the fewer to criticize or suspect the two brothers when they showed early signs of returning prosperity, though comment was not entirely lacking when the younger M. de Chatillon presently discovered himself in possession of the château and lands of La Roux. Having overcome his tendency to extravagance, he succeeded in retaining

possession of them during his life, and at his death bequeathed them to his daughter, Mlle. de Chatillon, in place of the wealth her mother had brought him."

The Jesuit paused reflectively.

"A pretty story!" I said. "It makes it harder for me to understand why one of her name should seek to find the present Vicomte de la Roux."

P. Dufour shook his head. "Though his misdeeds brought him prosperity, her father did not enjoy peace of mind. One can hardly say he felt remorse, but rather uneasiness. He became subject to fits of depression, and his health gradually declined. More and more, he became dependent upon his daughter, who tended him with loving care, and he finally came so far under her influence that before he died he informed her of the true nature of his transactions with the late Vicomte de la Roux. She urged him to make an effort to effect restitution, but he was reluctant to do so; after his death, she undertook the task on her own account. Hence her journey to this country."

"A strange mission!" I said. "But perhaps she has other resources?"

"None whatever. To make restitution will leave her penniless. But she has counted the cost, and is steadfastly resolved to pay it."

Profoundly moved by this astonishing disclosure, I stared at him in wondering silence.

"So you see, M. Regnier," concluded P. Dufour with a smile, "that in speaking of her purpose as trifling, you have, in a manner, done her an injustice."

I made no reply, but continued to stare at him for a time in silence, full of thoughts that I did not care to utter aloud.

"I have told you all this because I would like you to think more kindly of her," he said. "She has spoken impatiently to you at times, but that is not her natural disposition."

"And when she finds the Vicomte de la Roux, she will insist on beggaring herself by rendering to him all that she now possesses?"

"Yes."

"And what then?"

"That remains to be seen. She may enter the Church."

I pondered his words, and tried to picture Mademoiselle as a nun. But sweet and serene as was the face that rose before me, its expression spoke not of the devotional zeal that leads to the cloistered life, but rather of the quelling of youth,—a lily plucked from the sunshine of the garden, its beauty unfolded in the dim light of candles, its fragrance alloyed with the incense of sacrifice.

"Or," he added, "she may marry, should a suitor

appear in whose eyes her attractions are sufficient to compensate for lack of dowry."

"This cousin of hers," I asked, "what of him?"

P. Dufour shrugged his shoulders.

"Is she disposed to marry him?"

"I have seen no sign of it. If I err not, she dislikes and distrusts him, and regards his persistent attendance upon her as partaking rather of espionage than of fidelity."

"Her purpose does her infinite credit," I said, "yet it would be sad were she to succeed in accomplishing it."

Our conversation was interrupted by a light step in the corridor, and Mlle. de Chatillon entered, bearing in one hand a tray on which were cakes and wine. In the other hand she carried a candle (the early twilight having by now made the room quite dark) and as she paused within the doorway the quavering flame grew steady and bright, and cast its glow upon her and about her, irradiating the lustre of her glorious hair, the dainty poise of her head, the perfection of her lovely face. It was a fair picture, and lingers in my memory.

I rose to relieve her of her burden, and under her direction placed it on a small table beside the Jesuit's couch. She was not one to carry her quarrels into a sick room, and at his request she graciously consented

to be seated and remain with us while we ate, and nibbled at one of the cakes, carrying on meanwhile a sprightly conversation, in which I took little part, but listened, as one in an enchanting dream, to her laughter and her wit, until, too soon, she left us, and I returned to my tent to meditate upon what I had seen and heard.

CHAPTER IX

RECALLING the difficulties under which our infant colony struggled in the days of which I write, I often wonder that it survived. In the whole of New France there was no place, save at Quebec, where a man could venture outside his palisade to hunt, fish, or till the soil, without placing his life in imminent peril. The Iroquois were here, there, and everywhere, and were as elusive as they were ferocious. With the guns which the Dutch had unwisely given them, they were masters of the forest, and the Algonquins and Hurons, friendly by comparison, were being exterminated at a terrible rate. Flushed with their victories over their savage rivals, the Iroquois did not hesitate to attack the French, the smallness of whose numbers enforced a caution which the Iroquois were not slow to ascribe to cowardice,—a conclusion which affords a fair idea of the simplicity which limits the subtlety of the Indian mind. The fact that we were there at all was evidence of a degree of courage.

At times, courage was carried to a point,—mostly in respect to matters of religion,—which seemed to a

worldly man like pure foolhardiness. Thus, for example, during the first Winter after the founding of Ville Marie, when the river rose and threatened to flood us out, the Governor had made a vow that should the danger be averted, he would plant a cross on the mountain top for all the world to see. This vow was duly fulfilled, a distant and inaccessible spot being chosen, and to this inconvenient location frequent pilgrimages were now in order.

Had it been merely a matter of demonstrating courage in the leading of the Christian life, one might have regarded it with the admiration (or toleration) fitting to such manifestations; but when one considered the urgent need of our settlement for things material, and the pressing duties of tilling the soil, building the substantial structures that are necessary to meet the severe winters of New France, and in all things strengthening the newly founded town, it seemed a sad waste of time that able-bodied men should be taken from their work to serve as escorts for these eccentric expeditions.

It was a morning in early May. The service at the foot of the rustic cross was in progress. Peevishly meditating on the impracticability of celestial minds, I sat apart on a shelf of rock at the edge of the height which crowns the Island of Montreal. It was a noble view that lay outspread before me, flooded with

dazzling Spring sunshine. A hundred fathoms below, the river stretched from southwest to northeast as far as the eye could reach, a broad, steel-blue highway through the wilderness. On its margin I could discern the tents and houses of Ville Marie de Montreal. Beyond lay a vast expanse of forest, in which the gray-green and red of budding oaks and maples blended with the darker hues of firs and pines and tamaracks,—a shimmering sea of foliage, stirred by light breezes and shadowed here and there by loitering clouds. Leagues away the southern horizon was broken by the blue outlines of the mountains that lie between the river and the country of the Mohawks.

The service came to an end, and the participants drifted apart to enjoy for a few minutes the awakening freshness of the woods. Uneasy lest any of them should venture too far, I rose to my feet and set out on a voluntary sentry-go which presently brought me face to face with Mlle. de Chatillon.

I saluted, and suggested the desirability of the members of our party keeping together as much as possible. It was the first time I had met her since my visit to P. Dufour in the previous Autumn. She regarded me with cold impatience.

"Surely, Sir, this anxiety is uncalled for!" she exclaimed. "I am not a child, to wander away and lose myself!"

I replied that the woods were dangerous, and it would be well to avoid unnecessary risk.

"If you are uneasy in the woods, why do you not go back to your farm?"

I shrugged my shoulders. It was a question I sometimes asked myself.

"As for me," she continued, "if there is danger in the woods, it is high time I became used to it."

"Why so, Mademoiselle?" I enquired.

"Because I am to leave in a few days for Ihonatiria,—for Téaunustaye,—for the Huron Missions. I have succeeded in arranging to make the journey without your assistance, Sir," she replied.

I gazed at her in open wonder. "Mademoiselle is pleased to jest."

"Mademoiselle is in sober earnest. Mademoiselle with Père Dufour,—and M. de Chatillon, it would seem,—will join the expedition which has, no doubt, already left Quebec."

This was news! I doubted whether Mlle. de Chatillon had any conception of the trials and dangers of that three hundred leagues. No white woman had ever attempted it before. I wondered whether P. Dufour had endorsed the project.

"So you see," she said, "your opposition has served not to defeat but merely to delay me. I wonder if you will still be here when I return."

"Pardon, Mademoiselle," I replied, "you might better say 'if I return'."

With a nod of triumphant disdain she left me, and I fell to meditating even more deeply than before on the vagaries of my fellow colonists.

CHAPTER X

THAT evening I visited P. Dufour and took him to task for being a party to the proposed venture. The Jesuit listened patiently to my expostulations, but answered them with a shake of the head, as though to say that argument was useless.

"I have not encouraged the young lady," he replied. "In fact, I spoke at first much as you have spoken just now. But latterly I have a feeling that it would ill become me to persist in chiding her for following so firmly the purpose which brought her here."

"But cannot she send someone to make this search on her behalf?"

"Whom can she send?"

"As for that,—why not M. de Chatillon?"

His eyes twinkled. "That would be an idea," he said. "But, speaking seriously, there are several reasons against doing so. She does not wish to put herself under an obligation to him."

"But if he is to make the trip in any case——?"

"That is a different matter. As I have told you, she has no confidence in him."

"Then why not hire someone to go? The wealth which she seeks to restore may surely be properly used in seeking its owner."

"Whom can she hire?"

I refilled my pipe with deliberation, and lit it at his candle.

"Since I disappointed her by refusing to go on a previous occasion, I might be willing to make amends now by undertaking the errand, were she willing to entrust me with it."

P. Dufour pondered my offer. "Frankly, my son, I do not know whether she would trust you or not. She might regard it as merely another attempt to keep her from going in person."

"Her opinion would be correct. That was why I refused to go before, and why I offer to go now."

"Inasmuch as I am to visit the Mission in the course of my duties," he said, "I suggested myself as an emissary."

"Since her confidence in you is beyond question, I marvel that your offer was refused."

"For reasons which, while not entirely compelling, have some weight, Mlle. de Chatillon believes the matter can be most conclusively handled by herself. In the first place, she does not so much expect to discover the Vicomte de la Roux as to meet with those who might give her some clue to indicate

whither he went on leaving New France, and in questioning such people she relies to a great extent, as you know, on her intuition, which cannot be exercised by deputy. Again, should she by chance find the Vicomte de la Roux, her negotiations with him would be most readily handled were she on the spot. For example,—M. de la Roux is said to have been a young man of very generous and kind-hearted disposition. He might, perhaps, on learning the circumstances, refuse to deprive Mademoiselle of her inheritance."

"You interest me," I said, "and were the Vicomte to prove so unmercenary, what then?"

"She would insist on his accepting it."

"And were he to persist in refusing it?"

"He would surely accept at least some portion of it."

"In that case, do you think she would consent to retain the balance?"

"She is entirely opposed to the idea."

"But why?"

"She wishes to unburden herself of it altogether. Whatever he refuses to accept, she will give to the Church."

"And if she obtains proof of his demise without heirs?"

"The whole of it will go to the Church."

"A most admirable arrangement," I said, "—for the Church!"

"You must not offend my ears with sneers at the Church!" exclaimed P. Dufour. "What other agency through centuries of darkness has nursed the sick, shielded the fatherless, fed the hungry and comforted the comfortless?"

"Indeed," I said, "were all churchmen like you, it would be hard to find fault with the institution."

The Jesuit sighed. "I wish you would be more reverent, my son," he said.

"This subject has unusual aspects. I wonder what M. de la Roux will do about it when you find him. He will, I should think, be averse to condemning Mlle. de Chatillon to poverty."

"How can he help it? It will not be his fault."

"But suppose," I said, "suppose he were travelling this way just now on a magic carpet, and, attracted by the mention of his name, had stopped to listen to our conversation,—he would be in an odd dilemma, would he not?"

"In what respect?"

"He would have to choose whether he would step off his carpet and take his ancestral estate (which, having a magic carpet, he would not need) and consign an amiable young lady to a life of penury and dependence, from which she could escape only by

marriage or by taking the veil; or whether he would pass on without disclosing himself, in which case the enjoyment of his exceptional privileges would be marred by the thought of the hardships and dangers she would encounter in her long trip through the wilderness on his account."

"A curious position," agreed the Jesuit with a smile, "but there are no magic carpets nowadays."

"In such a quandary, what would you do?"

"I should pray for guidance, my son."

"But seeing that a magic carpet is closely akin to witchcraft, guidance might not be vouchsafed."

"In that case," he responded with a chuckle, "were I in the enjoyment of the measure of youth which still remains to M. de la Roux (assuming that he is alive) I might make use of my carpet to accompany so attractive a damsel on her journeyings in the hope of protecting her, to the extent of my ability, should evil befall."

"He may be with the English or the Dutch."

"Perhaps so. Their settlements can, if necessary, be visited later."

"When do you expect to set out?"

"Very soon. Probably within a week."

I rose to take my leave. "I should find it dull here, without your company, P. Dufour," I said.

"I too shall miss you," he replied. "I suppose,

now that Ville Marie has become established, you will think of returning to the Isle of Orleans?"

"Either that,—or perhaps you might gain the consent of Mlle. de Chatillon to my accompanying you."

The Jesuit looked up in astonishment. "But I thought your travelling days were over?" he exclaimed.

"I am seized again with the spirit of adventure."

Manifestly pleased at the prospect of my company (though with compunctions at taking me so far afield) P. Dufour assured me that my presence would be welcome, and that while Mlle. de Chatillon was not inclined to again ask my aid, she would be most unlikely to object to my joining the party of my own free will, whereupon I bade him good-night, and departed.

CHAPTER XI

It was the custom of the Indians of the Huron nation to come down to Quebec in considerable numbers, towards midsummer, to trade with the French; they would stay three or four days and then depart in a body for their own country. With them would travel one or two members of the Jesuit Mission whose task it was to bring news of the Mission to headquarters if travelling eastward, or, if travelling westward, to take with them the supplies necessary for their work. As I have said, the expedition of the preceding Summer had met with disaster. The missionaries themselves had been taken captive, but a number of the Indians had escaped and fled back to Quebec, where they had passed the Winter, deeming it safer to return home in the early Spring, before the arrival of the Iroquois on the waters of the St. Lawrence. Since the needs of the Mission were known to be pressing, it had been decided that two of the Jesuit Fathers from Quebec should accompany them with supplies, and it was in this heroic, but unmartial company, with its cowed and unreliable escort, that Mlle. de Chatillon had arranged to travel.

Under the circumstances, one would have expected that she would welcome any accession of strength to the party, and I found it hard to understand her attitude when I learned from P. Dufour that she was inclined to oppose my joining them. When I pressed him for her reasons, he explained that Mademoiselle did not dispute his argument that I would be of value to the expedition (which I have no doubt he greatly magnified) but seemed to have formed a judgment that I was opposed to her plans for finding the Vicomte de la Roux, and would be prone to hinder her rather than help her. From her point of view, which, in a broad way, was sound enough, her own safety was dependent on Divine Providence rather than on one defender more or less, and had she been called upon to decide the point, she would have left behind her cousin also.

Not wishing to argue with P. Dufour the question of how far one should rely upon Providence when other resources are available, I contented myself with pointing out that it might be found that I was one of the chosen instruments of Providence in this case, since I proposed to go whether Mlle. de Chatillon consented or not, and I set about making the necessary disposition of my affairs, after urging him, for the sake of harmony, to persist in his efforts to gain her consent.

In the course of our conversation he had suggested, not without a smile, that I should myself speak to Mademoiselle, and I gave the idea consideration, but should not have acted upon it had it not happened that I met her on the afternoon on which the expedition from Quebec arrived. In the crowd which had gathered at the water's edge, I found P. Dufour at my elbow and accosted him before I noticed that he was accompanied by Mademoiselle. She recognized my presence by a cool nod, but displayed no desire to enter into conversation with me, and since I could think of no advantage to be gained by thrusting my presence upon her before it became necessary to do so, I was in the act of turning away, when M. de Chatillon, who was with them, stirred up contention by expressing his satisfaction at the prospect of my being one of the party that would set out on the morrow.

As I had not yet published my intention of going whether accepted or not (having only mentioned it to P. Dufour in the strictest confidence) I avoided the necessity of answering him directly by enquiring of P. Dufour whether he had been able to arrange a place for me in their canoe.

That the consent of Mlle. de Chatillon was still lacking was evident from his hesitancy in replying, and before he found words in which to express the

situation at once precisely and diplomatically, Mademoiselle put an end to indirection by entering the discussion on her own behalf.

"Tell me, M. Regnier," she asked, "why do you wish to join us?"

It was a blunt question, and I answered it bluntly. "For reasons of my own, Mademoiselle," I said.

"I should be glad to know your reasons."

"I ask your pardon, Mademoiselle,—I am not prepared to disclose them."

She shook her head and turned to the Jesuit. "Do you wonder, Père Dufour, that under these circumstances I do not regard the company of M. Regnier as advantageous?"

"But look you, Louise," interrupted M. de Chatillon, "what matter is it that M. Regnier is unwilling to tell us what business he has at the Huron Missions? For my part, after seeing these Indians with whom we are to travel, I should deem it the height of rashness to refuse any reinforcement whatever!"

Mademoiselle regarded him with a slow, cold smile. "I can well believe that you would prefer a regiment of soldiers," she replied.

He flushed, and bit his lip. He was no coward, and the taunt stung him.

"I should much prefer a regiment of soldiers, or a single soldier, to this vile crew of treacherous sav-

ages with whom your inclinations lead you to trust yourself, my dear cousin," he said.

"I have reasons of my own, like M. Regnier," she said. "If you prefer his company, why do not the two of you join forces and seek safety in each other's protection?"

It was the Jesuit's turn to interrupt. "Come, come! My friends," he exclaimed hastily. "There is nothing to be gained by these unkind remarks. The matter has been discussed and settled, and the only point that remains is whether M. Regnier is to be admitted to our canoe. I know, Mademoiselle, that I have already pestered you beyond endurance on his behalf,—but after all, will you not let him come,—not as an escort, nor as a member of your own party, but merely as my friend?"

Though Mlle. de Chatillon obviously received the appeal of P. Dufour with more favour than that of her cousin, she still voiced her objection. "If M. Regnier were but a stranger, ignorant of my plans, or neutral to them, I should not hesitate to grant your request. But I feel that he desires that I shall not find the Vicomte de la Roux. Last Summer, when I asked him,—when I begged him,—to go with me to the Huron country, he refused. As his reason for refusing he cited not the toil of the journey, not the hardships, not the danger. No, if you please, it was

not these things which influenced him to deny me his company, but the mere fact that by doing so, he would debar me, too, from making the trip. And now,—now that I have made arrangements to go without him,—he suddenly changes his mind and finds that he has business in the Huron country,—business that makes it necessary for him to follow me, unasked and unwelcome, even as my cousin M. de Chatillon has done from the first. Can you guarantee, P. Dufour, that, coming in his capacity as your friend, he will do nothing to defeat my plans?"

P. Dufour turned from Mlle. de Chatillon to me. "There is much in that which Mlle. de Chatillon has said, my son," he observed. "I have known you so long and so intimately, and have come to have so high an opinion of your character that I am prone to accept your actions without asking for explanation and without suspicion of an unworthy motive. I confess that I am as much at a loss as Mademoiselle herself in regard to your reasons for wishing to visit the Huron country, yet surely I may tell her that there is in your mind nothing inimical to her or her purpose,—no thought of masquerading as a friend while acting the part of an enemy,—surely I may vouch for you in this respect!"

"I give you my word," I said, "to you, Father, and to you, Mademoiselle,—I give you my word, that

while I do not believe the Vicomte de la Roux is at the Huron Mission, and I am convinced that your journey will be fruitless, I shall do nothing to hinder you from reaching the Mission at the earliest possible moment, and if I am admitted to your party I shall behave in all respects as a well-ordered and loyal fellow-traveller from beginning to end."

"There," exclaimed P. Dufour, "you can ask nothing better than that! And I, for my part, can vouch for M. Regnier as a man who keeps his promises."

These assurances Mlle. de Chatillon pondered in silence and finally gave her consent, whereupon, lest she should revoke it, I left them without further parley.

We were to set out early the next morning. I had decided to send André back to the Isle of Orleans, and spent the evening in giving him messages and instructions to the men in regard to the conduct of the farm during the coming Summer. He begged eagerly to be allowed to go with me, but it was scarcely feasible, and furthermore, though he would have scouted such a reason had I given it utterance, I had no desire to expose him to the hazards of the journey on a quest that was no business of his. As we talked together, M. de Chatillon came to the door of my tent, and asked to speak to me. He had a bulky letter in his hand.

"I am told that it is your intention to send your man André back to Quebec," he said.

I nodded.

"Will you be good enough to get him to deliver this letter at Quebec, to be forwarded to France?" he asked.

I promised to do so, and he thanked me with much affability. "I am more than glad that you are to accompany us," he said. "If we must make these eccentric journeys, it is absurd to hesitate at taking advantage of the company of a man like yourself. Between you and me," he added, mysteriously, "I am of opinion that this enterprise has gone far enough, and if, by good fortune, we return in safety, there will be no more such adventures."

"How can you put an end to them?" I enquired.

"Time will tell," he replied airily. "For one thing, that letter to my father, which André will carry for me, may lead him to bring influence to bear that will not be without its effect upon the activities of Mlle. de Chatillon."

"You regard him as having more influence with Mademoiselle than you?"

"He may have," said M. de Chatillon, and, again thanking me, he departed.

Though I had no mind to further the plans of M. de Chatillon or his father, I could not but realize

the need of a restraining influence upon the impetuous tendency of Mademoiselle to carry forward her mission at all costs, and I felt no hesitation in asking André to take the letter, since, had I refused, M. de Chatillon could easily have found other means of forwarding it.

Shortly after daybreak the next morning we embarked at the head of the great rapids of Lachine. There were six canoes in all, with something over a score of redskins. The two missionary Fathers were in separate canoes, each in the midst of his savage escort, but we four,—P. Dufour, Mlle. de Chatillon, M. de Chatillon and I,—were in a canoe by ourselves. The day was dark and misty. When we waved our farewell to the good friends who had come to see us off, none of us was overcheerful, and as we skirted the northern shore and turned into the brown waters of the river of the Ottawas, our depression was aggravated by the onset of a drizzling rain.

CHAPTER XII

One of the least admirable traits of human nature is that which disposes some of us to take pleasure in the trials and vexations of others; yet I must confess to a certain inward satisfaction at the spectacle of M. de Chatillon's initiation into the employments of a voyageur. In the river of the Ottawas there are nigh two score places where the canoe must be taken out of the water and carried,—sometimes for miles,—and as many more where one must wade and push it upstream. Our Huron companions were in sullen yet eager haste, and in no humour to be delayed by the necessity of waiting for those who lagged behind, and I daresay M. de Chatillon never worked harder in the course of his life than he worked during the days when we travelled with them.

To Mlle. de Chatillon, also, the experience savoured more of novelty than of comfort, and I marvelled at the fortitude and patience she showed under these rough and wearisome conditions, so foreign to the life of a maiden of gentle nurture. Not the least of her trials were the continued grumbling of her cousin,

his muttering at the hardships to which her whims had exposed us, his malicious tendency to make the worst of every situation that arose. Though Mademoiselle was patient, towards him her patience in no wise partook of meekness, but rather of a contemptuous disregard of his murmurings, varied now and then by a rapier thrust of merciless wit that enlivened the journey to no slight degree.

Since it was out of the question that we should travel in the barbarous simplicity affected by the savages, our canoe was larger and more heavily laden than theirs and, strive as we would, we continually lagged behind them and delayed them. For four days they suffered themselves to be impeded by our company, but on the evening of the fourth day, P. Garreau, one of the missionaries, came to tell us that the patience of the Indians was reaching its end.

"Père Chabanel and I have reasoned with them," he said. "We have endeavoured to persuade them that the company of M. Regnier and M. de Chatillon is an advantage which justifies them in being contented with slower progress, but they are in an apprehensive frame of mind that does not incline them to listen to our arguments."

P. Dufour shook his head gloomily. "This is no surprise," he replied. "We have noted their dis-

position, and have anticipated this situation. Were the importance of your errand less than it is, we might urge you to persist in holding them back. But we should be as much at fault in making such a request as you would be in granting it."

"What!" exclaimed M. de Chatillon. "Would you justify them in leaving us behind?"

"It is a rule of the Mission," replied P. Dufour. "Our missionaries travel with the Indians by their favour, and are forbidden to impose their wishes upon them."

"What can we do?" enquired Mlle. de Chatillon, with a touch of anxiety.

"We can travel no faster,—that is certain," said her cousin.

"I fear not," agreed P. Dufour, thoughtfully. "I confess I am at a loss to know what course we ought to follow."

"Perhaps we might induce the Indians to moderate their speed by the promise of further rewards," suggested Mlle. de Chatillon.

"Unfortunately," replied P. Garreau, "they are in fear of their lives. The disaster last Summer has cowed them completely. Perhaps I should not say it, but it is only right that you should know their main objection; they have a superstitious dread that the presence of a woman will bring them misfortune."

"My faith!" muttered M. de Chatillon, "they are not such fools as I took them to be."

"It pleases you, no doubt, to realize how much you have in common with them," said Mademoiselle.

"It might be that if means were to be found whereby you would keep pace with them, their fears could be calmed," said P. Garreau. "In such case it would at least be less easy for them to desert you. I am sorry to be the bearer of such unpropitious news, but I wished to warn you, and to explain how impossible it is for Père Chabanel or myself to remain and cast in our lot with you, much as we would wish to do so."

When he had gone to join his comrade, we sat about our fire in perplexed consideration. P. Dufour and Mlle. de Chatillon were engaged in desultory conversation, M. de Chatillon was dozing from utter weariness, and I was smoking my pipe in a brown study, when the train of my thoughts was broken by the Jesuit.

"Come, M. Regnier," he said, "you have not uttered a word since we heard this bad news. What have you to suggest?"

"It is an awkward problem," I replied. "If we go on as we are, these Indians will leave us behind inside of two days."

"But how are we to increase our speed?"

"One method occurs to me," I said. "I doubt if it will be acceptable to Mlle. de Chatillon."

"What is that, Sir?" she enquired.

"The Indians are in six canoes. Let us try to induce them to take M. de Chatillon into one of their canoes and P. Dufour into another, and take the two Indians thus displaced into our own canoe with you and myself. In that way the speed of the other canoes would be a trifle lessened and ours increased, and we should have eight of the redskins in a manner tied to us."

"A most ingenious idea!" exclaimed the Jesuit. "Does it commend itself to you, Mademoiselle?"

Mlle. de Chatillon pursed her lips. "I should like to think it over," she said. "Your idea, M. Regnier, is that with two Indians in place of Père Dufour and M. de Chatillon you could make better progress?"

"I think I may say that much without injustice to either Père Dufour or M. de Chatillon."

Stirred by the repeated mention of his name, M. de Chatillon awoke. "What is that you say?" he enquired.

I explained my plan to him and it met with his immediate approval. "With three Indians each to ferry us, Père Dufour and I should travel in luxury."

"You would travel in luxury so long as they did

not put you ashore somewhere and disappear with your baggage," I replied.

"You think they might do that?" he asked.

"Or if our party became separated and you sought to keep them in subjection they might kill you in your sleep," I added.

"In heaven's name!" he cried peevishly, "why do you bring up this idea and then seek to dissuade us from adopting it?"

"Père Dufour will explain to you that if you come to travel in a canoe of the Indians you will do better to forget about luxury, and make yourself as useful as your experience permits you to be."

"That is very true," said P. Dufour.

"Furthermore," I went on, "if after all, we were separated, which would be by no means unlikely, Mlle. de Chatillon would find herself alone in the wilderness with two sullen Indians and a white man in whom she has little confidence."

Mlle. de Chatillon laughed aloud. "I must thank you, M. Regnier, for saving me from the necessity of a long and awkward explanation of my reasons for rejecting your plan," she said. "I admit that I am unwilling to venture on an arrangement that might result in separating me from Père Dufour, whom I look upon as my especial guardian and protector."

"Then my power of invention is exhausted," I

replied, "the only other course we can follow is to go on as at present and trust to luck."

"You should rather say 'trust in Divine Providence,'" said P. Dufour.

While I was engaged in setting up the tiny tent we had brought for the accommodation of Mlle. de Chatillon I heard them arguing the matter further. M. de Chatillon was contending that it was folly to proceed, and that they ought to abandon the enterprise and return to Ville Marie while there was still but a short distance to go. In what he said there was much truth and more futility; Madamoiselle was determined, and the more impatiently he urged his arguments, the more indifferently she brushed them aside, until finally I put an end to the dispute by informing her that her tent was ready, whereupon she left us with a curt good-night, and we rolled ourselves in our blankets and went to sleep.

CHAPTER XIII

On the morrow we set out earlier than the others, and though they shortly left us behind we caught up with them by pressing forward until late in the evening; on the following day the effort was too great, and they shook us off their heels and got clear away from us, and when, at nightfall, we lifted our canoe ashore and lit our fire, it was manifest that we were deserted.

Foreseeing an acrimonious dispute, P. Dufour wisely suggested that we should postpone discussion until the morning, when we should be rested both in body and in mind, and on this suggestion we decided to act. Mlle. de Chatillon retired to her tent immediately after we had eaten, and M. de Chatillon, too, was soon asleep. P. Dufour and I sat by the fire.

"What do you think of this business?" he asked.

"It is unfortunate, but might have been foretold by one familiar with the ways of the Indians."

"Most unfortunate!" said the Jesuit. "What course do you think we should now follow?"

"Beyond question, it would be safer to return to Ville Marie de Montreal."

"Might we not meet the Iroquois?"

"We might. But if we travel by night and hide by day we can doubtless slip past them unobserved," I said.

"I question whether Mlle. de Chatillon will consent to turn back," mused the Priest.

"As her guardian, protector and adviser, it is for you to prevail upon her to follow the course of wisdom and safety."

"You overrate my influence with her, my son," he replied, with an innocent but comical gesture of helplessness.

"It is at least as great as my own, or that of M. de Chatillon," I said.

"But should she refuse,—what then?" he asked.

"You must not let her refuse. We others look to you to convince her of the necessity of returning."

Though I spoke thus, I had less confidence in his success than I pretended, and my doubts were justified when, in the morning, after a long talk with her, he informed me that she was still firm in her wish to press onward. I expected we should hear from M. de Chatillon in opposition to her wishes and in this I was not mistaken. The discussion was brought on when, after we had eaten our breakfast, Mlle. de Chatillon observed that the sun was high in the sky and it was time we were on our way.

"We have yet to decide in which direction we shall go," said M. de Chatillon.

"Why should we not go on to the Huron Mission as we originally intended?" enquired Mademoiselle.

"Because we no longer enjoy the company and protection of the flotilla of redskins with whom we set out," replied M. de Chatillon.

"That is but a poor excuse for turning back halfway," said Mademoiselle.

"It is not a matter of turning back halfway. The journey is little more than begun."

"Nevertheless, it is my opinion that we should keep on."

"And it is my opinion that we should return."

"Are you afraid?"

"Come, come!" said P. Dufour. "Let our discussion be calm and without heat. M. Regnier,—I believe you, too, favour the abandonment of our journey."

"Most assuredly," I replied.

"Then your business in the Huron country is not so urgent as one might have thought," remarked Mlle. de Chatillon.

"It is not so urgent as to forbid me from stopping to conduct Père Dufour and yourself back to Ville Marie," I said.

"You are kind, Sir. Yet my respect for you

would be greater were you to display more resolution in following your declared intention."

"It seems to be my invariable misfortune to incur your disapproval, Mademoiselle. When I am stubborn, I displease you. When I am pliant, I displease you."

"Because you are stubborn when you ought to be pliant, and pliant when you ought to be stubborn."

"Indeed, Mademoiselle, you are unfair to M. Regnier," said P. Dufour, "it is not he alone who seeks to persuade you to turn back, but M. de Chatillon and myself also. I have discussed the matter with M. Regnier, and have taken counsel of his experience, and his judgment coincides with ours."

"That answers the question I asked myself this morning,—the question as to whence you derived the worldly wisdom of the arguments which you pressed upon me, and the viewpoint so different from that which you are wont to hold,—the viewpoint in which confidence has given place to concern and faith to fear."

The equipoise of the most benignant mind is not wholly exempt from disturbance. P. Dufour replied, a trifle shortly, that his anxiety was less on his own account than on hers. "For myself," he said, "it is no novelty to travel through the wilderness with an escort less friendly, less capable, less cou-

rageous than M. Regnier. But though I am a priest, I am none the less a man; I am perplexed and dismayed at the thought of your pursuing this adventure further, and I beg of you to turn back."

"Were your anxiety on your own account, I should feel more compunction in disregarding your wishes. But I well know that you, for one, are not influenced by fear for your own safety. After all, in what respect is our condition altered? Are we not safer in having learned that we must depend upon our own efforts and precautions? Is it not better that the Indians should abandon us now than that they should desert us in the face of an enemy?"

"It is not that our danger is greater," answered P. Dufour, "but rather that it is made manifest. We ought never to have set out. And now that the unwisdom of our course is demonstrated, we ought to turn back."

"That is a conclusion which surely admits of no argument," declared M. de Chatillon.

Mademoiselle surveyed him scornfully. "Am I to conclude, Sir," she enquired, "that your eagerness to accompany me was due to the fact that you did not foresee the perils to which you would be exposed?"

The face of M. de Chatillon flushed red with anger. "If you were a man, you would not say that!" he stuttered.

"Nor should I need to say it, if you were not a coward!" replied Mademoiselle.

His face went from red to white. "That is enough," he said. "For my part I withdraw my opposition to your wishes. Let us proceed by all means!"

"So far, good!" said Mlle. de Chatillon, calmly. "And now, M. Regnier, what of you?"

"You have underrated the loss we have incurred by the defection of our Indian allies, Mademoiselle," I replied. "To travel with them was hazardous; to travel without them would be tempting Providence."

"Then you, too, are overwhelmed by the risks which now confront us?" she said (hoping, no doubt, that her taunts would have the same effect upon me as upon her cousin).

"In a manner, yes, Mademoiselle," I said, "that is to say, I see now more plainly than ever what a hostage we have given to Fortune in bringing with us a lady who, however brave her spirit, is, after all, unfitted by the limitations of her sex to face the unavoidable conditions of the journey."

"Glibly spoken!" exclaimed Mlle. de Chatillon, "but you forget. You did not bring me with you. On the contrary, we brought you with us."

"To be exact, you permitted me to travel in your company."

"Under those circumstances you cannot complain if we continue to permit you to travel in our company to your destination in the Huron country," she said.

"I cannot complain, Mademoiselle," I replied.

"Then you, too, are willing to proceed?"

"I cannot complain, whatever happens, since I have no status save that of a guest. But whether I can justify myself in being a party to the venture you desire to carry on,—that is the point which perplexes me."

"Did you not become a party to it when you joined us in the first place?" enquired Mlle. de Chatillon.

"I have not been a party to it at any time. As you yourself told me, Mademoiselle, you had made arrangements to go without me."

"Then why on earth did you not suffer me to do so?" cried Mademoiselle, in exasperation. "Had we in your stead the Indian whose place you took, I wager there would be none of this faltering argument!"

"The argument springs from his having absconded in company with his fellows."

"What possible concern can it be of yours, M. Regnier, whether I run into danger or not? Why this officious solicitude for my safety?"

"In New France it is the custom for those who

are seasoned to the ways of the country to have an eye to the safety of newcomers."

Mlle. de Chatillon scrutinized me with very searching eyes.

"There is some other, hidden, reason for your opposition to my wishes," she said. "It may be that fear on your own account leads you to simulate anxiety on mine; I find it hard to impute cowardice to you, since your reputation and your demeanour do not lend justification to such an idea."

"I give you my word, Mademoiselle, that I am actuated solely by mindfulness of your safety."

"Your word!" echoed Mlle. de Chatillon. "What value am I to place upon your word? How long is it since you gave me your word that you would do nothing to hinder me from reaching the Huron Mission at the earliest possible moment?"

"Seven days, Mademoiselle."

"In the face of that promise, just seven days old, you have done your utmost to block me,—you have played on the confidence of Père Dufour with your solemn air of long experience,—you have aroused the fears of M. de Chatillon with your dark hints of the frightful dangers we must face,—you have even had the effrontery to try to work on me with your fears and forebodings! What more could you have done to hinder me?"

"On the contrary, have I not worked hard to keep up with the Indians? Did I not suggest, two days ago, a plan to prevent them from abandoning us?"

"A fine plan!" she exclaimed. "A plan which would have left me with no one but yourself and two Indians! That would have made it easy enough to compel me to turn back. But look you, Sir! M. de Chatillon is willing to proceed. P. Dufour, though reluctant, will not desert me. You, for your part, may accompany us or turn back as you wish. Make your choice promptly and delay us no longer!"

Even in the face of her imperious displeasure I was impelled to make a further effort to dissuade her. "Your pardon, Mademoiselle," I said. "If I have seemed to oppose your wishes it has been out of concern for your own welfare and safety, and——"

"Cease prating of my welfare!" said Mlle. de Chatillon, with an access of haughty arrogance which was perhaps justified by the annoyance which my persistence caused her. "It is no concern of yours! I have too many people who seek to rule me for my own good, and I will accept no dictation from one in whom I have so little confidence as I have in you!"

Inwardly raging, (not so much at Mlle. de Chatillon's irate words, as at the folly of the whole business) I ceased from argument, and after we had eaten a cold and unfriendly dinner we set forth once again.

CHAPTER XIV

MEMORY is a leaky container,—a sieve, into which our experiences are dropped from day to day, and through whose meshes little things fall rapidly away, and some that look big crumble up and disappear, and even the hardest and sharpest become rounded and blunted by the attrition of time, so that their edges cease to cut. And some things that seem trivial at the moment and are little noted, persist, and now and then, as we pause to contemplate the sifted residue, we find them gleaming here and there amidst the sordid miscellany with the lustre of imperishable gold.

And so, perhaps, it will be understood if I have little to say of the long and arduous journey to the country of the Hurons. Troubles enough there were, —cramped limbs and aching backs and bruised feet, —shivering nights and sweltering days,—countless mosquitoes and biting flies,—sullen dislike and conscienceless pilfering on the part of the so-called friendly Indians with whom we later fell in. As I look back upon it now, the outstanding memory of

the voyage is of the courage and uncomplaining endurance of Mlle. de Chatillon.

The four of us did not compose a genial company. For my part, deeply as I admired the steadfastness and high purpose of Mademoiselle, I had so aroused her anger and distrust by my efforts to turn the expedition back that my attempts to placate her were vain, and when I sought to shield her from the worst of our hardships, I must have done it with a taciturn ungraciousness which did nothing to mitigate the haughtiness with which she treated me, and at times seemed to further irritate her. M. de Chatillon, morose and sullen, brooded over the accusation of cowardice by which his cousin had taunted him into withdrawing his opposition. At first he sought to make me the confidant of his grievances, but with him I had little patience, and pointedly asked him why he had come if he was not prepared to do his part and make the best of things; from that time I was numbered in the list of his enemies, a classification which troubled me not a whit. The three of us had little to say to each other, and the burden of maintaining a conversation was often too heavy for P. Dufour.

There was no appreciable advantage in the company of the Indians whom we met. They were a band of Hurons who had come down the river of the Ottawas to trade with the nation of the Island, and

were now on their way home, and I had the liveliest distrust of them. There are men who throughout their lives consistently refuse to suspect the motives of their fellows, or to believe aught against them until actually victimized by their knavery. This is, without question, an endearing trait, and I have never known anyone in whom it was more fully developed than in P. Dufour. Indubitably, also, it makes for happiness, because, in the first place, most men tend to benevolence, and hesitate to harm those who trust them, while even a villain would usually prefer to injure an enemy rather than a friend; in the second place, our troubles, if anticipated, often cause us as much disquiet before as after the event,—to say nothing of those that do not come to pass. However, every rule has its exception, and in dealing with Indians, a policy of trustfulness is, in my opinion, undesirable.

We made our party as self-contained and compact as possible, not only with regard to our persons, but also with regard to our arms and provisions; always camping at a little distance from our savage companions, and taking turns in keeping watch at night. Even so, an occasional loss bore witness to the successful depredations of one or another of the shifty redskins, but we deemed it better to take no notice of their filching, and would have continued to

ignore it had they not contrived one night to steal a musket. This was a serious loss,—so much so that on the following morning M. de Chatillon and I discussed the matter with them with our pistols in our hands, and prevailed upon them to return the missing weapon. Their apologies were profuse, as is the manner of their race, whose curious custom it is not to punish the offender, but to make atonement vicariously by the offerings of his relatives and friends; but it was easy to discern an undercurrent of hatred which boded ill for us should we find ourselves by any mischance completely at their mercy, and I was rather relieved than otherwise when, next morning, we discovered that they had deserted us in a body, leaving P. Dufour and myself to argue at leisure the vexed question whether we should have done better to trust them entirely,—in which case, as I took the trouble to point out, they might have deserted us just as readily and plundered us of our very garments to boot.

With the exception of this trifling incident, our journey westward was uneventful, and we reached our destination in safety a few days later. The lake of the Hurons is made up for the most part of two great arms or bays, one of which extends southward to the straits, while the other, which is shorter, lies in a southeasterly direction. It was at the lower

end of this part of the lake that the Hurons dwelt.

The considerable numbers of this nation, living a comparatively settled life in a restricted area,—about ten or twelve leagues each way,—and their professed friendship with the French, appeared to offer an excellent opportunity for the establishment of a Mission, and this opportunity the Jesuit Fathers were assiduous to grasp. Unfortunately their plans were doomed to early failure, and the bloody and complete triumph of the Iroquois, which is now a matter of history, was already foreshadowed by the frequent raids of those fierce invaders.

Having in mind the simple house of almost savage crudity in which the missionaries had dwelt at the time of my earlier visit, I was impressed, when we reached Sainte Marie, by the appearance of the substantial structures they had since erected. Ascending the little river which led up to their headquarters, our eyes were gladdened by the sight of fields in which the tasselled maize grew high; and when we saw, at a stone's throw from the shore, a cluster of buildings in a walled enclosure some sixty paces long and thirty wide,—a stout looking fort with four tall crosses at its corners for banners,—the sight gave us no little comfort, wearied as we were by the dangers and toil of the wilderness.

CHAPTER XV

Mlle. de Chatillon did not find the Vicomte de la Roux at the Huron Mission, neither did she discover any trace of him, though every one who might have met him or heard of him was closely questioned. The enquiry took up but a few days, and when it was exhausted the next problem that arose was how best to return to Ville Marie de Montreal. This was a subject for anxious consideration. Our hosts were much perturbed at the suggestion that we should set forth as we arrived, a party of only four; but they could not furnish us an escort of Frenchmen from the Mission until the following Spring. None of us relished the idea of wasting the better part of a year waiting for the questionable safety of their expedition, and finally, by promise of rich rewards to be given them at Ville Marie, we succeeded in enlisting an assortment of eight Hurons, known to the missionaries and recommended by them (with evident misgivings) as being better than the average.

With this doubtful guard we embarked, toward the end of August, in three canoes. In the first were

Mlle. de Chatillon, P. Dufour and M. de Chatillon, together with an Indian who took my place at the stern. In the second, with me, were three Indians; the other four journeyed by themselves in the third. This arrangement we adopted with reluctance, since there were obvious objections to our being separated, but it had the advantage that the Indians likewise were separated, and would thereby be held more easily under control. Also, it seemed to be more to the taste of Mlle. de Chatillon.

For a fortnight all went well, and we made the best of progress; but when we had reached the lake of the Nipissings, Fate at last let loose the troubles that were in store for us, and we met with a desperate mishap. As we emerged early one morning from the lee of a sheltering island near the eastern end of the lake, one of the violent squalls that infest these waters roared down upon us. The leading canoe weathered the sudden onset and scudded before the wind toward the distant shore. The second, in which were the four Indians, was capsized. By good fortune it was driven back into the shelter of the island and we were able to save it and rescue the Hurons who clung to it; but it was over an hour before the wind and rain abated to such a degree as to permit us to proceed. Full of anxiety for our companions, I at last prevailed on the Indians to set out, and the wind having changed, we

toiled slowly and laboriously in the direction in which they had been carried. About noon, we reached the shore, and skirted it for over half a league before finding their canoe; when we found it, my fear that they had been drowned was replaced by the appalling apprehension that they had met a worse fate. They had, without doubt, landed in safety. Their canoe was pulled up out of reach of the waves and their footprints were to be seen on the wet ground. Probably with the purpose of seeking shelter from the rain, they had entered the forest; but their approach must have been perceived by those who hastened through the woods to meet and overpower them. Here was the hat of M. de Chatillon,—there the beads of P. Dufour,—and caught on a bramble, a little, torn, gray glove,—a little, torn, gray glove, with a faint, delicate fragrance.

I heard a rustle, and looking up, found myself alone; the Hurons were slinking away to their canoes. I hastened to overtake them.

"Cowards!" I said, "what do you fear?"

No need to ask, nor did they answer. I could read their pigeon-hearted purpose in their eyes.

"The Iroquois are gone," I said. "Were they here, they would have fallen upon you ere this."

"We are few in number," said one.

"Who knows,—they too may be few," I replied.

"You have muskets,—stand guard by the canoes while I go and count their footprints. It may be that we have a chance here for an easy victory and a scalp apiece."

A fierce light dawned in their eyes, and judging they would await my return, I entered the woods to reconnoitre. To one who is, in a measure, skilled in woodcraft, it is not difficult to estimate the number of a party that has passed, especially if the tracks be recent and the ground wet, and I soon satisfied myself their number was small. I returned to the shore and called loudly to the Hurons to come and see. Reassured by my recklessness in shouting to them, they followed me readily enough; when they too perceived what I had seen, their poltroonery gave place to a wolfish eagerness that needed no further urging. Pausing only to conceal our canoes in the bushes and furnish ourselves with an extra supply of powder and balls, we set forth in hasty pursuit.

Hour after hour, through thickets and swamps and rocky glades, we hurried on. Twilight came, and it began to seem that we would be baffled by the darkness. Already we had more than once lost the trail in the dusk, when at last we perceived, a hundred paces ahead, the flickering light of a fire. Halting the redskins, I dropped on my hands and knees and crept cautiously forward.

There were about a dozen of them,—Iroquois in full war paint, devoting themselves whole-heartedly, with every sign of enjoyment, to the torture of the unfortunate Huron whom they doubtless regarded as the least noteworthy of their captives. He was tied to a stake in the midst of their fire, and I doubted if we were in time to save his life, but we could at least make the attempt. I hastened back to my party and roused their ferocity to its final pitch by telling them what was going forward; creeping up unnoticed, we delivered a volley at close range that reduced the number of our foes by half at the outset. The panic-stricken remnant were overcome and killed before they had time to recover themselves, and I left the Hurons to complete the bloody task of slaughter and untie their fellow while I turned to see what had become of my friends.

I found P. Dufour and M. de Chatillon lying face upward on the ground, with their outspread hands and feet tied to pegs. They were in evil plight, having been beaten and submitted to preliminary tortures of a painful nature, though not such as to put their lives in immediate danger.

"Tell me!" I cried, as I untied them, "where is Mademoiselle?"

M. de Chatillon, whose tongue had been injured by some deviltry and was badly swollen, could not

speak, but rolled over with a groan. P. Dufour essayed to answer me but could achieve only a faint whisper. I put my ear to his lips.

"They have carried her away," he muttered.

CHAPTER XVI

It is needless to dwell upon the mental strain of that long September night. To keep to a beaten path through the woods in such darkness would have been difficult; to follow a trail was impossible. The tortured Huron died shortly after being released, so that in place of the eight with whom we had set out, we had but seven. Four of them I instructed to prepare to carry P. Dufour and M. de Chatillon back to the lake shore in the morning; to this they readily agreed. But when I told the other three that they were to come with me in pursuit of the Iroquois, it was another matter. I argued with them and stormed at them, but to no purpose. "We have done enough," they said. "What is one woman, that we should throw away our lives?"

M. de Chatillon was in worse state than I had thought. One of the bones of his shoulder had been broken by a blow with a club, so that it would be a matter of weeks before he would be capable of any task requiring strength or endurance. It was clear I must follow alone, and seek to accomplish by strategy what I could not hope to achieve by open force.

P. Dufour was in better plight, and when I had chafed his limbs and given him a drink, he was able to sit up and converse with me. He told me of the capture, which was substantially as we had surmised. Being familiar with the Iroquois jargon, he had understood much of the wordy debate they had held in regard to the disposal of their victims, and had learned that their chief, with a large band of Onondagas (to which nation of the confederacy they belonged) was on the borders of the Huron country some distance to the south. It was to this chief that Mlle. de Chatillon was to be taken, and it was a slight relief to hear that apart from binding her so that she could be carried without a chance to struggle or escape, they had refrained from violence toward her. But when P. Dufour went on to tell me that they had purposely delayed their departure until the torture of their first victim was well under way, so that she might suffer the mental anguish of seeing him writhe amid the flames, I ground my teeth in a rage that was multiplied tenfold by my inability to do aught but sit and listen to him.

I arranged with him that he should hold the party for a fortnight at the headwaters of the stream which leads into the river of the Ottawas. If, by the expiration of that time, we did not appear, he was to press on down the river to Ville Marie de Montreal, leaving

behind, in a hiding place which I carefully designated, one of the canoes, with the personal baggage of Mademoiselle and myself and such utensils, weapons, ammunition and food as could be spared. This provision, upon which I insisted with no idea of using it, (since if we did not come by that time it was unlikely that we ever would) but merely to reconcile him to the idea of going on without us, afterwards turned out to be of the greatest value, and unquestionably saved our lives.

When at last the sky changed from black to gray and I prepared to depart, his fortitude broke down, and the tears streamed from his eyes as he blessed me and kissed me farewell. M. de Chatillon was asleep, and I had no desire to waken him.

The rain of the preceding day, though heavy, had not been of wide extent, and the part of the forest in which I now found myself was dry as tinder, which made the tracks of the Indians more difficult to discern. Nevertheless, when the light increased I was able to follow them at fair speed, and I hurried on in the hope that by making such an early start I would gain an hour or so. Whether it was due to this, or to their being wearied and impeded by the necessity of carrying Mademoiselle,—or whether my anxiety lent me wings,—I came in sight of them at dusk.

As the darkness closed in I lay in silent conceal-

ment, while they lit their fire and sat around it in noisy talk and laughter, little thinking of pursuit. Presently I crept closer, and was rewarded by a sight of Mademoiselle, who lay bound on the ground near them, but not within their circle. My heart ached for her misery, but it would be folly to approach more closely for the present. With luck I could release her while they slept, but what then? Wherever we went, they could track us, and we could not go far in the darkness; they would be on our heels at dawn. Pondering this problem, an idea occurred to me, and I retreated until their fire was barely visible a furlong away, and spent the next hour or two in circling their camp with a maze of tracks leading away to a considerable distance in all directions, but mostly to the north, it being my belief that they would expect us to retreat that way, and my intention to baffle them by going still further to the south.

When the light of their fire began to die away, I again approached, and saw that they had laid themselves down to sleep. The sooner we got away the greater the distance we could put between them and ourselves before morning; but since a false move would be fatal, I summoned my patience, and waited nearly two hours, that their sleep might be at its soundest. By this delay we reaped an unexpected and material advantage; in the meantime a strong

wind sprang up which rustled through the trees so loudly as to cover any slight noise we might make in our retreat.

Finally I drew my knife and crept to the side of Mlle. de Chatillon. As I approached I heard her give utterance to a low moan.

"Mademoiselle," I whispered, "are you awake?"

She was all attention in a moment. "Who is that?" she exclaimed.

"It is I, Regnier, come to release you."

"Thank God!" she murmured, and without ado I proceeded to cut her bonds. After she had recovered the power of motion in her cramped limbs, we crawled away side by side for fifty yards or so, until we were out of earshot of the Indians.

"So far good!" I said. "We had better get up and walk now. I wish we could see to run."

I helped her to her feet, but she fell down again with a sharp cry of pain.

"Oh!" she moaned, "I cannot bear it. My feet have been burned."

"What?" I cried, aghast.

"I tried to run away last night and they caught me, and burned the soles of my feet so that I should not again try to escape!"

I could find no words to express my thoughts. I looked back hungrily at the dull light of their smould-

ering fire, but this was no time for planning revenge. In silence I stooped and picked her up.

"Put your arms about my neck," I said. "I must carry you."

Silently she obeyed, and silently I carried her, hour after hour, through the pitchy darkness, groping and stumbling, judging our direction by occasional glimpses of the stars and keeping the wind in my face when the stars were not visible. The first light of day came when we were in a grove of pines, and we did not perceive it until we emerged into a copse of oaks and maples. Beyond was an open glade and when we had reached it I laid her down and looked about us.

We were in a curious ravine or gully, less than a hundred paces wide, with high, precipitous walls of granite. It was by facing the wind that we had been guided along it instead of being blocked by one or other of the cliffs, which ran parallel to each other as far as I could see in either direction. Ahead of us was a long rocky stretch without sufficient vegetation to afford concealment. Unless we could go a considerable distance before being seen there was nothing to gain by pressing onward.

"Do you think they can follow us?" asked Mademoiselle.

"It is more than likely."

"You cannot carry me as fast as they can pursue."

"That is true enough," I said, "but if we cannot fly we can fight. We must look for a hiding place."

As I spoke, my eye fell on a cleft in the wall of rock to our right. "See," I said, "there it is, all ready for us."

It was a crack or fissure, extending the full height of the cliff, and opening to a width of about six feet. I carried her into it and laid her upon a moss-covered bench of rock which was almost as flat as if made for a couch. Then I gathered some of the loose blocks of granite and built them up into a wall, breast high.

"Now we are in a fort," I said. "How many of your captors have firearms?"

"Only one," she replied; "the others had clubs and knives."

Our fortifications completed, it seemed desirable to reconnoitre the ground in front of us. I left Mademoiselle my knife and one of my pistols and walked towards the opposite cliff. To my joy I found a tiny stream that was not entirely dried up, though nearly so. I carried a hatful of water to Mademoiselle, who drank it eagerly.

"Did they give you anything to eat?" I asked.

She shook her head.

In fact we were both famished beyond the point of hunger, having fasted for forty-eight hours, but I

dared not leave her and go to seek food. I contented myself with storing two more hatfuls of water in a hollow in the rocks, and then we set ourselves to wait.

Mlle. de Chatillon had watched my preparations in thoughtful silence. Presently she spoke.

"If they track us, we cannot well escape," she said.

"That remains to be seen," I replied.

She shook her head. "They will likely kill us both," she said.

"Perhaps."

"Even now, you could escape if you would leave me behind."

"No doubt."

"Why do you stay to die with me? I have done nothing to earn your regard."

"Because, having thrust my company upon you thus far, it would be unfair to deprive you of it when it may be of advantage to you."

She blushed. "It is I who have been unfair," she said. "I have regarded you as an enemy, and now you heap coals of fire on my head."

I made no answer, and we fell into silence again. No doubt my laborious mixing of the trail delayed the Indians, but it was not for long; these redskins have an uncanny instinct for tracking their foes which is beyond the comprehension of a white man. We

had barely two hours to wait until we heard a rustle, and through a loop-hole I saw them emerge from the woods. Since we could not fail to be discovered, there was no object in waiting, and I singled out the fellow with the arquebus and shot him. He fell over and lay still, and his comrades sprang back into the shelter of the trees.

"That should make your feet feel a trifle better, Mademoiselle," I remarked, as I reloaded.

It was well enough to jest, but we were in a desperate position. I succeeded in killing or wounding one other before they learned the folly of exposing themselves; and then they settled down to watch us.

"What are they waiting for?" asked Mlle. de Chatillon.

"They are waiting for the coming of night, when I cannot see to shoot them," I replied.

"I hope," she said, "that when,—that when the time comes we shall be able to avoid falling into their hands alive."

"Time enough to worry about that!" I said. "We have some hours yet. Let us cudgel our brains rather for a means of escape."

Pale as she was, she smiled bravely, and I turned away to watch our besiegers. The wind whistled up the gorge steadily and monotonously. It must have been an hour later when I heard her voice again.

"I have a plan," she said.

"Tell it to me, Mademoiselle."

"These Indians cannot climb the cliffs which enclose this valley."

"Not here, at any rate," I replied.

"They cannot go on down the valley without being exposed to your musket."

"Quite true, Mademoiselle."

"So that if they retreat it must be through those woods to the left."

"I doubt if they contemplate retreat," I said.

"They may be compelled to retreat," she said. "If you can manage to set those woods on fire!"

I stared at her in wonder. It was a pretty idea!

Now, while the wind was favorable, was the time to put it in execution; it was the easiest thing in the world. I stealthily gathered together a pile of dry moss and sticks, and struck flint on steel. Five minutes later I threw blazing brands out among the parched grass and herbage, which took fire in a dozen places.

"That succeeds!" I cried, in exultation, and applied myself once more to the loophole and my musket.

With a crackle and a swish the little fires grew and joined one another and crept toward the edge of the forest; there the crackle became a roar and the creeping became a rush, and the conflagration spread and

advanced till the whole width of the valley was a great seething sheet of flame.

None of the Indians came into the open. Presently I crept cautiously out and looked to see if there was any possible shelter or corner unscathed by the fire where they might be lurking, but there was not. They had fled before it, and I noticed with deep satisfaction that the wind was blowing far faster than any man could run.

"Are they gone?" asked Mademoiselle, when I rejoined her.

"They are gone," I replied, "and unless I am mistaken, they will not return."

Though this entire band was now accounted for, others might come, and it seemed desirable that we should seek a fresh retreat without delay. I inspected the belongings of the Indian who had been shot, and relieved him of one or two trifles that might be of use, including a wallet containing some dirty strips of smoked raw deer's meat. Of this repulsive food I offered a little to Mlle. de Chatillon, but she could not touch it, and I did not press it on her, hoping to be able to provide something more inviting before long; I bolted as much as I could bring myself to swallow, being minded not so much to gratify my palate as to keep up sufficient strength for the exertion that seemed necessary. Of his weapons I broke up the arquebus,

and took the powder and balls and a hatchet that was in his belt.

It was approaching noon when I once more took Mademoiselle up and proceeded down the valley, following the course of the rivulet which threaded it, in the reasonable expectation of reaching some larger body of water. In this we were not disappointed. The walls of rock grew lower and less steep and the space between became wider, and presently we entered a low-lying stretch of forest, dense and swampy. Through this we struggled until at last we were rewarded by finding ourselves on the rocky shore of a lake which lay in a direction from southwest to northeast and was about two leagues long and half a league wide, dotted here and there with small islands, for the most part little more than reefs.

This sheet of water offered an improved means of locomotion, with the advantage that we would leave no trace of our passage, and finding, by good fortune, a dead tree overhanging the water, I hacked at the trunk with the Indian's hatchet until the projecting part fell in, branches and all, making a raft of a sort. It remained but to fashion a rude paddle and set Mlle. de Chatillon on board, and we were on our way once more; the wind, which had done us one good turn that day, came again to our assistance and carried us, with little effort on our part, in the direction in

which we desired to go, towards the northeast end of the lake at the other side.

As we drew out from the woods that bordered the shore and could see over and beyond them, it was brought home to us what a fury of conflagration we had kindled. Far to east and west, the smoke, rising ever higher, filled the northern sky. It was an awesome spectacle to us who were responsible for it, and I thought with no little compunction of the countless poor dumb beasts who were perishing in it. But there was no time for sentiment, and ere long an idea came to me and I took a piece of meat out of the Indian's wallet. Mlle. de Chatillon saw me and shuddered.

"Are you going to eat more of that?" she asked.

"Not if we can get something better, Mademoiselle," I replied and produced from my pocket a fishhook and line.

"See!" I continued, baiting the hook and throwing it in. "If we are lucky, we may catch our dinner on the way."

The waters of that country swarm with fish of good size and delicious flavour, and in almost less time than it takes to tell of it, we had two of them.

"At any rate," I said, "we need not starve. Now let us land and eat. How does this island suit you, that we are approaching, Mademoiselle?"

She was weary and weak and in pain, but her high courage was undimmed, and she answered me with a laugh, and ere long I lifted her ashore and laid her on a pile of brush and lit a fire, over which we roasted one of our fish; when she had tasted it her appetite returned and she declared it was beyond praise, and ate heartily, and so did I, and what with the warmth of the fire and the comfort that comes of a full stomach, it began to seem that we were not so badly off as we might have been.

The sun was setting, and there still remained the task of providing shelter, but this was not difficult. With dried grass and dead leaves and the branches of pine trees I made a snug and cozy retreat for Mademoiselle in the lee of an overhanging rock, and when I had bathed and bound up her poor feet and covered her over with more leaves and grass, she heaved a sigh of contentment and thanked me kindly and presently fell asleep; and being at the end of my endurance and reasonably sure of freedom from molestation, I shortly followed her example.

CHAPTER XVII

THOUGH we were now in a position of comparative safety, it was comparative only, since we were far from help and faced the early advent of a stern Winter. Hope of being able to rejoin our friends was gradually dispelled by the slowness with which Mlle. de Chatillon's injuries mended. Until she could make full use of her feet it would be folly to venture into the forest again, and we had no alternative but to wait on the curative process of nature.

In a primitive way we achieved a tolerable condition of well-being. On our island, which was eight or ten acres in area and densely wooded, small game was plentiful; the lake was full of fish and I succeeded in shooting deer on two occasions. We also found nuts and a few mushrooms, so that our diet did not lack a certain variety. For shelter we erected two little huts side by side, thatched with branches and shingled with bark. After the first few days Mademoiselle was able to hobble on crutches, an improvement which afforded her the greatest satisfaction.

The morning after our arrival, the wind died away,

and air and water fell into halcyon stillness. Drifting back from the north, a thin veil of white smoke settled about us, that gradually grew denser and hid the shores of the lake from our eyes and cast its white reflection into the gleaming water, so that lake and sky became as one, and we were shut in by whiteness all about.

Despite our anxiety, our impatience to be gone and the uncertainty of our future, the odor of burning wood is still dear to me for the memory it calls up of those days of impotent and dangerous delay. There was little to do but wait, yet on my hands, at least, the time did not hang heavy. To serve Mlle. de Chatillon was a privilege, to be with her a pleasure, to listen to her a delight. Whereas in former days she had regarded me with aversion, she now seemed to find a certain pleasure in my company, to which she was more than welcome, for her conversation was an unfailing spring of music and wit and good sense. Her interest in the incidents and surroundings of pioneer life was never-failing, and she continually led me on to tell her of my voyages and adventures, and the things I had learned about woodcraft and farming. When she was able to get about we would saunter here and there, and I would tell her (so far as I knew them) the names and habits and uses of the trees and plants and animals and birds that

we came upon. I taught her the huntsman's methods of cooking without the utensils of civilization, and at this she soon excelled me. She was most interested when I cured the skins of the deer we shot and made her a little pair of moccasins; when I embellished them in the Indian way with rude ornaments of porcupine quills her delight was unbounded.

Another diversion which occupied many hours was the building of a canoe, which, to be sure, was not very necessary, since we could not expect to travel further in it than the shore of the lake, and might have contrived a raft with much less trouble; but Mademoiselle was curious to see how it was done, and so, piece by piece, I constructed it before her eyes, of a light framework of wood covered with sheets of birch bark. As it turned out, it was a source of much pleasure to us both, being seaworthy and comfortable, and enabled us to wander about the lake at will, finding new beauties and trifles of interest in every little bay and on every rocky point and islet. The first frosts had not yet come, and here and there we would see clumps of late flowers, and Mademoiselle would have me gather great bunches of them, and when I gave them to her she would hold them in her arms as a child holds a doll, and so carry them home to our island for the sheer love of carrying them and fondling them.

All things come at last to an end, yet it was not without a tinge of regret that one evening I watched the sun set, and reflected that it would be necessary to resume our travels the next morning. A night's steady rain had finally quenched the smouldering embers in the forest and washed the smoke out of the air, so that the distant pine trees, behind which the sun was setting, stood out clear and black across his red disk, and the bright clouds that glowed upward towards the zenith were mirrored downward towards the nadir with all but equal fire.

Mademoiselle was now able to walk without trouble, and presently she came and sat down on a ledge of rock beside me. She, too, was in a pensive mood, and for a time gazed thoughtfully at the western sky. Save for the whisper of an occasional ripple or the distant cry of some wild bird or beast, the stillness was unbroken.

"And you," she said, "what do you see in the sunset and the forest?"

I pondered her question, "I do not know, Mademoiselle. Something that is in all sunsets and in all forests."

"As for me," she said. "It makes me think of my home in France,—at La Roux in Auvergne."

"You are fond of your home at La Roux in Auvergne?" I asked.

"I love it!" she said. "And yet,—it is not my home,—it can never be my home again."

Not knowing what to say, I held my peace.

"Père Dufour, I believe, has told you the object of my search?"

"Yes, Mademoiselle."

"No doubt you think it foolish?"

"Many would call it so."

"But you?"

"How can one know? Most of the things we do to-day appear foolish to others. Many of the things we did yesterday now seem foolish to us ourselves."

A slow smile dimpled the lady's cheek.

"Indeed!" she said, "I should have thought you, for one, would be free from those humiliating recollections that now and then beset more impulsive people."

I shrugged my shoulders. "Tell me, Mademoiselle, this home of which you speak,—what is it like?"

"It is old and gray, and the stones are clad with moss and ivy. It stands in a great park which falls away to the south and west, clustered here and there with oak trees. There are no defences now, but where the moat once was the banks are covered with roses that in the month of June are at the height of their bloom,—a fragrant, glowing thicket of yellow and pink and white. In the rear are the gardens and

the stables and the orchard and the vineyard, and a grove of dark pines where the rooks clamour in the Spring. And there is a grassy spot under one of the old oaks where I used to sit and look down the gentle slope and over the roofs of the sleepy little village,—over the river and the smiling fields to the rolling hills beyond. And I would watch the ripe grass rippling in the breeze, and listen to the hum of the bees and smell the hot sweet breath of the clover, and dream,—and dream,——"

Though the melody of her voice had trailed away into silence, I said no word to recall her thoughts, but gazed reflectively at the fairness of her face in the fading twilight.

"And the great carved stairway and the mullioned windows and the armorial bearings on the walls,—they all speak of the honours of the family of St. Étienne de la Roux. As a child I felt myself an intruding stranger in the home of a vanished lustre; when I came to know the truth, that I was not an intruder merely, but a fraudulent usurper, the melancholy pleasure of contemplation was replaced by the humiliation of dishonour."

"Mademoiselle!" I remonstrated, "could the honoured dead of La Roux have risen to life about you, they would have been proud and glad to welcome you to their home!"

"And so," she continued, soberly, "being desirous of putting matters right so far as might still be possible, I made enquiries, but could learn only that M. de la Roux had sailed for New France years ago,—and here I am."

"Where no white woman has ever been before."

Mademoiselle's serenity had returned. She rose to her feet with a little laugh.

"Yes," she said, "I am here,—a source of unconscionable anxiety to my most worthy and valiant protector, whose kindness is more deeply appreciated than words can tell. I bid you good-night, M. Regnier."

With an airy courtesy she left me, and I seated myself again to study for a while the face of the rising moon.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE extent of the area burned over by the fire we had kindled became evident to us the next day, when we set out to find the store of necessaries that P. Dufour had promised to leave for us. At the northern shore of the lake we regretfully abandoned our little canoe, and climbed up the side of a bare, rocky ridge. From the crest of this ridge we could see far to the west and north and east, and the scene that met our eyes was one of mournful desolation. The very soil was burnt. Of the trees that had covered the landscape, nothing remained but an occasional blackened trunk. Within the whole horizon there was not a sign of life.

Though we had expected something of the sort the reality was worse than we had looked for; nevertheless our path lay directly across the devastated region, and recognizing the futility of hesitation, we plunged into it forthwith. It was not a pleasant journey. At every step a cloud of dust rose about our feet, and ere long we took on the appearance of a pair of blackamoors. Here and there we came to little gullies or fissures in the rock which had been passed over by the conflagra-

tion, and in one of these we took refuge at nightfall. The sky was clear and the air was almost frosty, and we had no wraps save the clothes we wore, but by building a fire we managed to put in a night of disturbed and uneasy sleep, interrupted every little while by the necessity of rising to put on more wood. When, at last, morning dawned, we set forth once more, wearily trudging and stumbling along. More than once I was seized with the fear of losing our way, but fortune favoured us, and late in the afternoon we came to the banks of the stream we sought. Here we enjoyed the inestimable privilege of washing off a portion of the grime that coated us, and, greatly refreshed and invigorated, we set out to look for the canoe and the supplies which we hoped to find. As we approached the designated hiding place our anxiety and eagerness grew to a feverish pitch, and when at last we found that our hopes were not disappointed our exultation knew no bounds. Here, snugly concealed amidst the low bushes that fringed the stream, lay our staunch canoe, well filled with all that we needed most,—blankets and clothes, tools, utensils for cooking, powder and shot, a bag of corn, a tent for Mlle. de Chatillon, and for me a parcel of tobacco. If in our earlier journeyings we had considered we were undergoing hardship, we now realized that we had been travelling in the lap of luxury.

One of the most pleasant memories that comes to me when I look back through the years is of the utter comfort and contentment we experienced that evening when, after we had eaten our fill, I lit once more my cherished pipe and basked in the light and warmth of the fire, and listened to the cheerful, even merry, converse of my passing fair companion. Satisfied with the present, we thought neither of the uncertainty of the future nor of the peril of the past.

That our friends had already departed was no surprise to us, for we had long overstayed the time which had been agreed upon. P. Dufour had left a letter for me.

"My Dear Son," it read, "should this message ever come to your eyes, you will know with what a heavy heart I write it. Hoping against hope, we have waited longer than you suggested, and were it possible to prevail upon the Indians to stay, we should remain here still longer. I have no words to express my grief. May God in his mercy spare you, that I may see you once again in this life; but if not, His will be done. Farewell, dear children; your names shall ever be in my prayers."

That he had indeed overstayed the appointed time was shown by the date upon his letter. It had been written but two days prior to our arrival.

I handed the letter to Mlle. de Chatillon. "Had we

come night before last," I said, "we should have found them still here."

She studied the letter pensively in the flickering firelight. "Poor Père Dufour," she said, "no doubt he is convinced that we are dead. I would we could overtake him and relieve his distress."

"Your wish is mine," I replied, "though for a less unselfish reason."

She smiled, "I know too, it would be desirable if we could travel in their company."

"More than desirable," I said. "It would make all the difference between delay and danger on the one hand, and speed and comparative safety on the other. With them we could travel openly,—by ourselves we must travel stealthily, with the utmost care to avoid being seen."

"That is so," agreed Mademoiselle, with a sigh. "Do you think we can succeed in rejoining them?"

"Perhaps. We must rise at dawn and pursue them at the top of our speed."

"To-night, at least," she responded, "we shall sleep in comfort."

Tired as we were, we embarked at the first sign of dawn, and the rising sun saw us well on our way. Though I had spoken of the danger of travelling in broad daylight (since once seen, there was little hope of escape) we accepted this risk for the time being

in the hope of attaining greater safety in the end. There was this about it also, that hostile parties would be journeying either down the river or up; if they were behind us, going down, our haste would bear us further away from them, while if they were before us, they would be first met by our companions, and would likely hang on their heels for a time at least rather than continue up the river without pause.

All day long we plied our paddles doggedly (Mademoiselle bravely and stubbornly doing her part, at which she had by now no little skill) and when the sun set we went on by the light of the moon till after midnight. The next day we did the same, and the next, and such good progress did we make that on the fourth our weariness was cheered by the discovery, toward evening, of the place where P. Dufour and his party had camped the night before; by digging in the earth beneath their fire, I found it was still warm. We had gained a day!

Despite our fatigue we pressed on three or four hours longer, and when, the next morning, we again took to the water, it was with the hope of overtaking them by that night. This hope endowed us with renewed vigour, and with wind and current in our favour we had already covered some leagues, when an unexpected incident occurred to delay us. We were approaching a bend in the river and had drawn close to

the shore to pass the turn, when we heard a hoarse cry, and an Indian woman, scantily clad, staggered out of the bushes and fell to her knees at the water's edge, beseeching us by frantic gestures to come to her aid.

Desperate as was our haste, we should have been lacking in every vestige of humanity had we ignored her plea. We drew up to the bank and signed to her to come aboard, but when she tried to rise and come to us her strength failed her, so that she fell to the ground.

"She is ill," cried Mlle. de Chatillon in a voice of pity, "the poor creature!"

I sprang ashore and lifted her into the canoe and when Mademoiselle had covered her with a blanket we turned out into the stream once more.

Huddled under the blanket, she lay gasping and chattering in a severe ague, though the sun shone warm upon her. We did not stop to question her, but hastened to put ourselves out of sight of the spot where we had found her, since we feared that she might have been closely pursued. This precaution we afterward learned to have been unnecessary; she was an Algonquin squaw, of the Nation of the Island, who with her husband had fallen into the hands of the Iroquois. He had been killed and she had been carried away captive toward the country of the Hu-

rons. She was not one to yield abjectly to the tyranny of fate. She had killed one of her captors and made good her escape; but the hardships and privations she had endured had gradually sapped her strength, and by the time she fell in with us she was in a condition of perilous and deplorable illness.

All this we learned later. In the meantime, we knew only that her advent was most inopportune, since her added weight impeded us and her miserable state imposed upon us a distracting burden of care and attention. By as much as her presence increased the necessity of our overtaking our friends, it decreased the likelihood of our being able to do so. Still, there was no help for it, and we held moodily but strenuously on our way.

All that night the Indian woman coughed and groaned and raved in fever and delirium, and when morning came my fear that we were doomed to indefinite delay was changed to certainty. Though each of us had slept only half the night, I was gloomily making ready to embark, when Mlle. de Chatillon came to me.

"M. Regnier," she said, "we cannot go on. If we try to travel with this woman, I think she will die."

"That is so," I said. "It seems more than likely she will die in any event. Should she live, she will be no better able to travel for many days. It will

mean we must go on to Ville Marie by ourselves; that may cost us our lives also."

"To save me, you have already faced a more desperate risk, so that I know you do not demur because of anxiety for your own safety," she replied. "God has been merciful to us. Let us be merciful to this poor woman whom He has put in our charge, and trust in Him."

In silence I began undoing my preparations to depart.

"You are not angry at me, M. Regnier?" she said, wistfully.

"Mademoiselle!" I exclaimed, "Were I to be angry at one so beautiful, so generous, so brave,—were I to be angry at you for also showing tender mercy and loving kindness to one in affliction,—I should be indeed unjust!"

She blushed at my outspoken commendation, and smiled in sweet confusion. "You too, Sir, are not without merits," she replied, and with this exchange of compliments, we set about making more elaborate arrangements for the comfort of our patient.

CHAPTER XIX

EIGHT days the Indian woman lay between life and death, burning with fever, panting for breath, with a curious rattling in her chest, and much pain in breathing; on the ninth the fever departed, her skin became moist, and she fell into a natural sleep.

"She will live," said Mademoiselle, as we stood and watched her.

"It seems so," I agreed. "That being the case, I must to-day set about building a house."

"Building a house? What has her recovery to do with that?"

"Had she died we might have pressed on, late as it it. But since she will recover we must prepare to spend the Winter here."

Fortunately, the spot in which we found ourselves was well suited for our purpose. We were on the northern shore of the river at a point where it broadened out into an expanse of water which was almost a lake. Behind us the low ground sloped gently up to the foot of a steep cliff which curved in a rough semicircle from west to east, and would protect us against

the coldest winds. From the water's edge to the wall of rock, a distance of a hundred paces, the ground was thickly grown with trees of medium size, mostly pines and firs and cedars.

Anticipating the necessity of a prolonged stay, I had already chosen a suitable site for a cabin, on a little knoll at the base of the cliff, and now that the matter was settled, I took our axe and fell to work. It would be wearisome to follow the details of the task or the makeshifts I was compelled to adopt; it is sufficient to say that the cabin was substantially but roughly built in cribwork fashion of logs notched together at the corners, with a fireplace of stones and clay at one end and three narrow dormitories at the other, in each of which was a primitive bench on which to sleep. The floor was of mother earth, carpeted with chips and bark, and for dryness we relied on the drainage provided by trenches on all sides communicating with the lower ground near by. For windows we had peep holes that could be stuffed up if the weather grew too severe to leave them open, and for a door we had a narrow opening facing the rock, to be covered with the canvas of Mlle. de Chatillon's tent.

By the time this work was completed, the nights were very cold, and it was quite time to move in. Our patient had been slowly gaining strength; had I de-

sired a reward for my labours, I could have asked nothing better than the manifest gratification on the poor woman's face when, one dull, raw evening, we carried her through the narrow doorway and laid her on a comfortable bed from which she could see the logs blazing on the hearth. Mlle. de Chatillon, too, made no secret of her satisfaction; my mind was divided between compassion that a lady of her gentle birth and affluent upbringing should be reduced to finding pleasure in so crude a habitation, and admiration of the cheerful and kindly spirit in which she exclaimed upon every good feature of my design and refrained from criticizing the shortcomings of its execution.

Our habitation being completed, there was little more we could do save nurse our patient. This was the season when the Iroquois war parties were returning down the river toward their own country, and we saw not a few of them pass our retreat. To discharge a firearm would have been to court discovery, and we lived mostly on fish and on such small game as we could snare, and looked forward to the time when all our enemies would have been driven south by the coming of Winter and we could carry on with less need of concealment and silence.

To me, it was a season of rare contentment. The breeze was laden with the smell of Autumn and the

sun shone hazily from his late rising to his early setting. Indolence was in the air. In the morning I would go the round of our snares to see what Heaven had sent us. When the sun's warmth had begun to make itself felt, we would carry Marie (as we now called her) out of doors for an airing. Mademoiselle would sit beside her and sew and talk while I engaged in leisurely fashion in such small tasks as presented themselves; at evening we would retire indoors, and as soon as the darkness had fallen thick enough to conceal our smoke, we would light our fire and cook our evening meal, following which we would sit before the fire until it was time for us to go to our rest.

If Marie had caused us delay and disappointment and danger, she rewarded us in a measure by the entertainment which we gained from our attempts to educate her. At first it was my task to act as interpreter, since Marie knew no French and Mlle. de Chatillon was ignorant of the Algonquin tongue; but this condition did not long abide, for Mademoiselle was an apt pupil and Marie also displayed marked quickness in picking up our words and phrases, so that they could soon carry on conversation with little or no help from me.

But when one sets about civilizing an Indian woman, it is necessary to teach her more than the

mere language of civilization. Simple yet subtle, polite but stubborn, the redskin offers a baffling problem even to the Jesuit, and Mademoiselle found she had her hands full when she undertook to convert Marie from heathendom to Christianity. Sometimes Marie would prove pliant to a fault, responding "Good" or "That is true" to every proposition; but when urged to adopt the faith which so readily met her approval, she would say "It is good for the French; but I am of another people, with different customs." Another time she listened to Mademoiselle's description of Heaven, but when asked if she would not like to go there, she replied that she would sooner go where her relations and friends and husband had gone. Nor was there room in her mind for the lodgment of such abstract and unpractical ideas as that of loving one's enemies,—"I hate my enemies and would kill them all if I could," she would say, and her eyes would bear witness to the sincerity of her remark. Patiently as Mlle. de Chatillon worked upon her, the credit of her ultimate conversion belongs to me; one day I chanced to observe that there was no way in which she could better please Mademoiselle, who had done so much for her, than by becoming a Christian, whereupon a great light dawned upon her, so that she allowed herself to be converted forthwith, and thenceforth repeated Aves, Credos and

Paternosters with the utmost docility on all appropriate occasions.

Sometimes her questions were so direct that it was difficult to think of a suitable answer. One evening, for example, when Mademoiselle was describing the life led by the people of France, and the conveniences and luxuries they enjoy, Marie interrupted her with the natural enquiry as to why she had come hither.

"But perhaps you have been driven away," she went on, "and had no where else to come?"

"No," replied Mademoiselle, "I came of my own free will."

"But how it is that you, a maid, can go where you will?"

"I have money, with which I pay my way."

"Money? What is that?"

"Like wampum," I explained, "but more sought after."

"And where do you get this thing that is more sought after than wampum?"

"From my estates," answered Mlle. de Chatillon.

"What is 'your estates?' "

"The land which I own, in France. People pay me for letting them live on it."

" 'The land which you own?' But surely no one can own land? You cannot make it,—you cannot destroy it,—you cannot carry it with you. You say

people pay you for letting them live on it,—how do you make them do that, when you are so far away across the big water? Is there some great Chief who holds them in fear of you so that they pay you for letting them live?"

"Not for letting them live," explained Mlle. de Chatillon, "but for letting them live on my land."

"Then is there other land they can live on without paying anyone?" asked Marie.

"No. All the land in France is owned by one person or another."

"Then those who own no land must pay someone if they are to live at all? I cannot understand it,—why they do it. And you,—how is it that you do not do the hard work? In my nation every woman does the work for her man. He fights,—she works. It is what men and women are for. But with you and Bigbeard it is different. He is the man, yet he does the most of the work. Does he also fight?"

"My faith, yes!" said Mademoiselle with a laugh. "You should see him fight!"

"Then why does he not make you work?" enquired Marie, innocently.

"You must ask him," replied Mlle. de Chatillon, demurely.

"Why do you not make Mazelle work, Bigbeard?" persisted the Algonquin woman.

"You do not understand, Marie. Mademoiselle is a great lady, with many who serve her and many more who would like to serve her. I am but a poor and humble farmer. Mademoiselle is not accustomed to work. Me, I like it."

"What is the difference between a great lady and a humble farmer?"

"A very marked difference. If you had lived in France you would comprehend it," I explained.

While Marie pondered this information, I stole a glance at Mlle. de Chatillon and found her regarding me with curious intentness.

" 'Humble?' " said Marie, "What do you mean when you say 'Humble?' "

"That is precisely what I, too, was about to ask," added Mademoiselle.

"Poor and lowly," I answered.

"I should not call you lowly," remarked Mademoiselle thoughtfully, "and as for being poor,—you are not as poor as I shall be if ever I find the Vicomte de la Roux."

"For that reason I find it hard to wish you success."

"You think it better that I should have wealth rather than happiness?"

"By no means! But so long as you seek him, you are happy in the belief that you are doing your duty, and at the same time you remain in the position of

comparative independence ensured by the possession of the wealth you seek to transfer to him."

"M. Bigbeard," said Mademoiselle, "I cannot see, by reason of the feature that gives you your new (and very appropriate) name, but I think,—in fact, I am sure,—that you are speaking with your tongue in your cheek."

" 'The Vicomte de la Roux?' " interrupted Marie, "who is that?"

"The Vicomte de la Roux is the man I have come to seek," replied Mlle. de Chatillon.

"You have come to seek a man?" repeated Marie.

"Yes."

"But why do you need to seek a man, when you have Bigbeard, who works for you and fights for you and admires you whenever you are not looking,—why do you seek another man?"

"Among the French, Marie," I explained, "Mademoiselle is considered to be very beautiful, so that everyone admires her. She seeks the Vicomte de la Roux, not as a man, but because she has a very valuable property which once belonged to him, and she wishes to give it back to him."

"But why do you wish to give it back to him, Mazelle?"

"Because it really belongs to him."

"Did you steal it from him?"

"No," replied Mademoiselle, gravely, "I did not steal it, but it was given to me by the person who did."

"Among my people," said Marie, "when we steal things we keep them, if we can."

"That is not unusual among the French," I said.

"Only among those of the French who are wicked," said Mlle. de Chatillon reprovingly; and she spent the rest of the evening in instructing her pupil in the standard of honesty current among European peoples, which, while not perfect, is, on the whole, superior to that of the Indians of New France.

CHAPTER XX

TOWARD the end of November, Winter set in abruptly with a series of heavy snowfalls, accompanied by blustering winds and followed by days of intense cold, and we had an opportunity of learning how our log house would meet the requirements of the climate. To our relief, we found it warm and comfortable, due no doubt to the width and depth of our fireplace and our free use of fuel no less than to the sheltered location we had chosen.

When the weather cleared, the Iroquois being by now all gone, I went out on a hunting expedition and was fortunate enough to shoot a fine buck and a number of partridges, and on my return was able to report that tracks were plentiful. Being thus assured of a sufficiency of fresh meat for some time to come, I had little work on my hands, the less that Marie was now well enough to assist Mlle. de Chatillon with her household duties, so that I was driven to chopping firewood for mere exercise.

Under these agreeable conditions, the time elapsed pleasantly and uneventfully, and we should doubtless

have lost track of it altogether, had I not followed a custom I had long ago formed of making note of each day as it passed, and Mlle. de Chatillon was surprised when one morning I informed her that this was New Year's eve.

"Then we must celebrate it!" she exclaimed, and under her direction I spent the afternoon in decking the walls and chimney stones with branches of glossy evergreen which relieved to a marked extent the monotony of the rough background upon which they hung. The fire, piled high with resinous sticks which hissed and crackled in a sheet of flame, gave out a warmth and brightness that penetrated every corner; when Mademoiselle at last placed upon the table the juicy roast of venison which I had watched with hungry eyes for an hour or more, we sat down to our simple repast in a spirit of gayety and conviviality that left nothing to be desired.

Following the feast, we adjourned to the fireside, where we sat, snugly ensconced, and listened to the wind outside, whose blustering and storming but emphasized the comfort of our little haven of refuge. Presently Marie rose, and with a grunted good-night retired to her dormitory, leaving us alone.

"I wonder where our friends are to-night," said Mademoiselle dreamily.

"No doubt they are safe at Ville Marie, and mourn-

ing our loss," I said. "That is to say, I suppose Père Dufour is mourning us. With M. de Chatillon it may be different."

Mademoiselle smiled. "So you doubt if my cousin, M. de Chatillon, is mourning us," she said.

"He has no reason to grieve for me," I replied. "Also his grief for you may perhaps be tempered by the expectation of succeeding to your estate. He is your next heir, is he not?"

"He would be my next heir," answered Mademoiselle, "were it not for the fact that on leaving Quebec, I made my will."

"Indeed! Was he aware of your having done so?"

"I presume he is aware of it by now," she said. "If he is anxious to succeed to the estates of La Roux its contents will not please him."

"If my curiosity may be pardoned, Mademoiselle, I should be interested to know what disposition you made of the property."

"I left it to the Vicomte de la Roux."

"But if he be not found, what then?"

"It is to be held for him for a period of ten years. If at the end of ten years he is still missing, it is to go to the Ursulines at Quebec."

"I hardly think M. de Chatillon will applaud the arrangements you have made, Mademoiselle," I remarked.

She looked at me with a twinkle in her eye. "He will be furious," she said. "Were I a man I should look forward with apprehension to our next meeting. You know he is of a vindictive disposition, and, furthermore, he is a great swordsman."

"Were you as brave a man as you are a lady, you would fear no one, Mademoiselle," I said.

She laughed. "At any rate, being a woman, I do not fear M. de Chatillon," she replied.

"Mademoiselle," I said, "may I repeat, without offence, something I once said that annoyed you?"

"That is for you to judge, M. Bigbeard," she responded mischievously. "You have earned the right to a certain freedom of speech. But still, you must be careful."

"It should not annoy you," I said. "I do but wish to repeat that in my opinion it is not likely you will find the Vicomte de la Roux in New France."

"Since I have been everywhere in New France, and have not found him, your opinion seems to have been, in a manner, justified."

"Does it not seem probable to you that he may long ago have returned to Europe?"

"That may be. I am puzzled at having found no trace of him whatever. There are few people here now. There were fewer in the days when he is said to have come here. It seems incredible that a gentle-

man of his consequence should have come and gone without being remembered by any of the older inhabitants."

"Has it occurred to you that if he still lives, he will be sure to revisit the scenes of his youth sooner or later, so that perhaps your best chance of finding him is to return home and be on the lookout for him?"

"And stop wandering about the world causing people trouble and danger and keeping them away from their farms. Is it not so?"

"Your visit to New France has been an inspiration to all of us, Mademoiselle. The thought I have in mind is that it would be premature to give the property of M. de la Roux to the Ursulines so long as there is any possibility of his appearing later."

"I have left those behind me who will meet and welcome him should he come to La Roux in my absence, but I cannot sit still indefinitely and wait for him to appear."

"Why not, Mademoiselle?"

"It unsettles my whole life. For example, I must remain single in the meantime, since, if I am married, my husband will acquire an interest in my estate, and he may not take kindly to my disposing of it in the manner which I have in mind."

"That is an aspect of the matter that had not oc-

curred to me," I said. "It is a pity that such a business, for which you are in no wise responsible, should embarrass you in this way."

"Do not waste your sympathy," said Mademoiselle, airily. "It has not embarrassed me in that way yet. Nevertheless, time is passing, and I should like to arrive at some finality in regard to a matter which has so much bearing on all my plans."

"Suppose," I said, "suppose you find the Vicomte de la Roux, and he refuses to accept your offering,—what then?"

"I shall make him accept it."

"But should he persist in refusing?"

"I am, as you know, very determined," replied Mlle. de Chatillon quaintly. "I am not accustomed to being met with refusal. In fact," she added significantly, "I can remember only two occasions on which I have asked a man to do me a favour and he has denied it to me."

"Were I the Vicomte de la Roux, I should refuse to do you an injury under the guise of a favour by permitting you to condemn yourself to indigence and dependence on my account."

"Were you the Vicomte de la Roux," said Mademoiselle, "I should profit by past experience, and take steps to arrange matters so that you would later do without being asked what you had refused to do

in the first place. But now let us peep out at the stars, and see if we can tell what time it is."

The wind that had raged earlier in the evening had died down. The night was cold and still and clear,—so clear that the stars blazed with adamantine brilliance, and seemed to hang down out of the sky. It was past midnight.

Mademoiselle wished me a Happy New Year, and I returned the compliment, and we hastened to reenter our warm cabin, for the words froze on our lips. I stood aside to let Mademoiselle pass, but she bade me enter first.

"I have heard it is unlucky that a woman should be the first to enter the house on New Year's morn," she said whimsically, as we tied in place the canvas that served for a door.

"In our position," I agreed, "we cannot afford to neglect any precaution."

She laughed, and bade me good-night, and, being disinclined to sleep, I sat down by the fire again and lit my pipe.

In the active years of youth and middle life a man indulges but little in retrospection, since the interests and pursuits which ordinarily engross his attention have, in the main, more to do with the present and the future than with the past. The events of his career follow one upon another, each crowding the preceding

one into the background, while his viewpoint and habit of mind change so gradually and imperceptibly that he is unconscious of the alteration, save, perhaps, for an idea (often erroneous) that he is wiser than he was. It is only now and then, when in a moment of idleness he stumbles upon some once familiar haunt, or finds, perchance, an old forgotten letter, or a long-neglected treasure of his boyhood, that his memory carries him back once more to those earlier days; and thus, too, it sometimes is in the hour of the passing year.

With half closed eyes I watched the rising smoke of my tobacco, while my thoughts drifted aimlessly into the past. I saw myself, a little boy, scrambling over the old stone wall into the woods where the wildflowers grew, and running downhill with my companions to the stream where the minnows nibbled one's bare toes and the fallen tree made an alluring and adventurous bridge. I heard again the proud rattle of my accoutrements, as I swaggered in the flush of early manhood among the comrades of my soldier life; out of that boisterous memory emerged a tenderer and sweeter one, of something little noted in those thoughtless days,—something that now moistened my eyes and blurred my vision,—the yearning, tear-stained face of my dear mother when, on my departure for the wars, she threw her loving arms

around my neck and prayed God for my safe return. From that my thoughts travelled to the bleak Winter day when I stood bareheaded by an open grave and heard the frozen earth rattle on the lid of her coffin, and felt on my arm the shaking, feeble grasp of my poor father, who was so soon to follow her. There are few blessings a man can have more precious than the teaching and protection of good and affectionate parents; though the pain of the bereavement had long since been healed by the soothing hand of time, a wave of love and gratitude welled up in my heart, as I thought of those two graves at my home in far away France.

I sorrowed, more on his account than on my own, at the grievous and unmerited burden of misfortune that had hastened my father's death, and wished his dying hours might not have been darkened by the thought that I was stripped of my inheritance: this consolation he had, that neither his name nor mine was stained with dishonour. For myself, the loss of my prospects had never weighed overheavily on my mind. I had had a part in many stirring adventures and interesting travels, and though I was now at an age to desire a fixed abode, and a somewhat quieter and more meditative mode of existence, I was not sure that the life I had lived was less attractive than the life I had left.

The expedition in which I was now involved, I contemplated with mixed feelings. My anxiety for the safety of Mlle. de Chatillon caused me to dread the hazards of our journey down the river in the coming Spring; but I could not deny to myself that the privilege of continued and intimate association with one who possessed the qualities of person and disposition that gave her every word and look and gesture indescribable charm, was a pleasure that would end too soon.

Assuming, however, that Providence should favour our return, and we should complete our journey without mishap, what then? Would Mademoiselle be content to return to France and hold her fortune in trust for its rightful owner, in the hope that he might some day revisit his early home? Would she perhaps assume the search to be hopeless, and dedicate her wealth and herself to the Church? Or would she, in preference to the cloistered life, bestow her hand on one of the many young gallants who would eagerly seek it?

One other solution of the problem lurked in my mind,—an alluring solution, which I had often dismissed as impracticable, yet could not succeed in permanently banishing from my thoughts, and which whenever I entertained it, aroused in me conflicting emotions of trepidation and desire. On this

occasion, being in a fanciful mood, I allowed the idea more rein than usual; the night was far spent when I finally put fresh logs on the fire and betook myself to bed.

CHAPTER XXI

MEN in all lands and in all ages have rhapsodized in prose and in verse on the coming of Spring; and truly, if there be any time of the year when those of us not endowed with the gift of words realize our deficiency, it is when we find ourselves once again basking in the sunshine, while the muted strings of our emotions quiver in unison with the murmuring hum of awakening Nature, and, sensing the fragrance and beauty about us, we yearn for a freedom of expression which would enable us to give utterance to the harmony that swells within us.

In such a mood I stood by the river's edge one exquisite morning in April. Yesterday and the day before had been misty, with incessant falling of warm rain, but now the sun shone from a sky of clearest blue, which met the woods and waters in a clean, sharp line of demarcation; the world seemed to have been swept and garnished. Under foot the grass was already green, and the violets and white wood lilies were in bloom; the air was full of fragrance and the winsome whistle of birds.

Anon I heard a sweeter, richer note, the voice of Mademoiselle, who approached me through the trees singing to herself the ancient rondel of Charles of Orleans,—

"Le temps a laissié son manteau
"De vent, de froidure et de pluye
"Et s'est vestu de brouderie
"De Souleil luisant, cler et beau
"Il n'y a beste ne oyseau
"Qu'en son jargon ne chante ou crie:
"Le temps a laissié son manteau
"De vent, de froidure et de pluye.
"Rivière, fontaine et ruisseau
"Portent en livrée jolie
"Gouttes d'argent d'or faverie;
"Chascun s'abille de nouveau
"Le temps a laissié son manteau
"De vent, de froidure et de pluye."

As she finished her song she espied me and greeted me with a saucy bow. I advanced to meet her.

"What have you in your hand, Monsieur? Wild-flowers, I vow!"

Awkwardly I offered her the posy. "A tribute, Mademoiselle, from the fairies of the forest to their Princess."

She blushed, and accepted it, gravely, graciously.

"Their poor, exiled Princess!" she said. "It was good of you to hear and convey their message."

"After all," she continued, reflectively, "the exile is not an unpleasant one."

"You find it tolerable, Mademoiselle?"

"Better than tolerable. Just now, for example,—with this sunlight, and this sky, and this river,—and an envoy from the fairies to bring me flowers,—I find it positively enchanting."

"When you return to France," I said, "your memory will be stored with much that will be of interest in years to come."

"I am reminded, Sir, of your own solemn words, uttered a year ago. You might better say 'If you return to France'."

"A year ago," I repeated, "it seems less than that."

"Time passes," she observed, sententiously. "It is two years since we set out on our travels together,—nearly three years since I left France."

"And you think you may not return there?"

"Why should I? There will be nothing to take me."

"But have you not considered the plan I once suggested, to await at his home the return of M. de la Roux?"

"It does not appeal to me," she said.

"But why not, Mademoiselle?"

She laughed. "Because I am lacking in that virtue which you, of all men, most steadfastly exemplify,—the virtue of patience."

"It is a virtue that all farmers must have, or acquire," I replied.

"Tell me," she said, "when we return to Quebec do you intend to devote yourself once more to the work of your farm?"

"But yes, Mademoiselle."

"What do you find in such a monotonous and laborious life?"

"My living, for one thing."

"But have your thoughts never risen to higher pursuits?"

"Higher, Mademoiselle? In what respect?"

"Pursuits in which success would give you a higher rank among men?"

"What have you in mind that would be better for me than farming?"

"Have you, for example, ever thought of being a soldier?"

"To be killed in the quarrels of princes? I have no such ambition."

"But in the service of princes men rise to rank and wealth. Do not such things appeal to you?"

"They are too easily lost, and often too dearly bought. One can eat but three meals a day, and wear but one hat at a time. At my home I enjoy a quiet life with some measure of comfort."

"You are too young to speak that way!" she ex-

claimed, impatiently. "I would that I could do something to unsettle your mind."

As if anyone could have done more! I made no answer, but gazed out over the water at the sunlit southern shore.

"At what are you staring?" she demanded.

"At the river, Mademoiselle."

"And what are you thinking?" she persisted.

"I am thinking that the time has arrived for us to take to our canoe again."

"What! So soon? And leave our snug house?"

"The ice has all but gone. If we delay, we may meet the Iroquois."

"I do not like these Iroquois!" exclaimed Mlle. de Chatillon, with a slight shudder. "They are terrible!"

"They are to be feared, at least, if not respected."

"They are fiends in human form," she declared.

"No worse than our friends the Hurons and Algonquins. Take Marie, for example."

"Marie! She is kind-hearted, grateful, affectionate,—simple-minded, but otherwise the same as you and I."

"I doubt it, Mademoiselle. But here she is, coming to join us. Let us see."

I beckoned her to approach and in a moment she stood beside us.

"Tell me, Marie, when your people take Iroquois prisoners, what do you do with them?"

Her eyes snapped. "We caress them with sticks and knives and burn them with fire," she replied.

"But that is no way to treat your enemies. You are now a Christian and should love your enemies."

"I am now a Christian, and I love my enemies," she repeated dutifully, "but my people, they are not Christians, and they torment the Iroquois till they scream like children!" she added eagerly.

Mademoiselle sighed. "Are you ready to come with us down the river, Marie?" she asked.

The Indian woman replied with an affirmative grunt, and together we went to inspect our canoe and prepare for our departure. There was little to be done, since our belongings were of the simplest; having all come out of the canoe, they could be put back into it with little packing. By evening, all was ready for an early embarkation on the following day.

As we sat before our snug fire for the last time, our mood was tinged with melancholy.

"We have been most comfortable here," said Mlle. de Chatillon, looking about her at the rough walls. "It makes me sad to think that to-morrow night this cabin, in which we have found so much of warmth and cheer, will be cold and deserted, and will remain so night after night and year after year, until at last

the timbers decay and the roof falls in, and it becomes a shapeless ruin. A house in which human beings have lived seems to absorb from them something of life, of humanity; its desertion savours of loneliness, its decay and collapse of death. My feelings are much the same as when we left behind us the little canoe you made for me. There is something solemn, something irrevocable in travelling as we are travelling, through the wilderness,—one is seized with the thought that here we shall never come again."

"I have passed this way before, Mademoiselle, and may be called upon to do so in years to come. I trust it may never be your lot," I replied.

"Indeed," she said, "it is a brave heart that boldly faces these vicissitudes again and again. But should it happen that you do return, you must light a fire and sit here for an hour and try to remember Louise de Chatillon,—how she was unkind to you because you refused to lead her into dangers which you knew better than she did,—how you followed the Indians and rescued her after she had lost all hope of rescue, —how she came to depend upon you and trust to your strength and skill and courage."

"See!" she added, whimsically. "These flowers that you picked for me this morning and which I have worn all day long,—I shall lay them, withered

as they are, on this shelf above the fireplace, and when, years hence, you come back and perhaps find what remains of them,—do you not think that will help you to remember something of me?"

"Mademoiselle," I replied, "there is nothing of you that I shall ever forget, save the unkindness of which you speak,—and that I have already forgotten."

With a smile and a sigh she rose to leave me. "I am sentimental to-night, and that is no frame of mind for one who ventures on these waters. I bid you good-night, Sir," she said.

CHAPTER XXII

THE river was in flood, and the swollen current bore us swiftly on our way. Until such time as we should reach the Nation of the Island, we judged it safe to travel by day; there was little likelihood of Iroquois bands having made their way so far up the river since the opening of the Spring.

Had we two been alone, I should have been inclined to steal past the home of this Nation by night rather than trust ourselves in their power, for I had always found the Algonquins sullen and thievish allies at best; but they are not entirely lacking in the virtue of gratitude for service done to one of their tribe, and it seemed likely that our rescue of Marie would ensure a friendly welcome. Our expectations in this respect were more than justified, and when Marie had told them her story our popularity was without limit. We were conducted at once to the presence of their Chief, a one-eyed potentate whose reputation for sanguinary ferocity was equalled by his fame as a crafty and unscrupulous politician. He greeted us with open arms, and declared that his affection and respect for us as the rescuers of his

countrywoman was the more deep by reason of his recent conversion to the faith which we professed. He enlarged on his esteem for the French, mentioning and eulogizing, I verily believe, every Frenchman he had ever met, including P. Dufour and M. de Chatillon, who had visited him in their journey down the river in the preceding Autumn; from that he turned to an exhaustive history of his dealings with our people from the beginning. He showed how all his actions in the past (some of which had been questionable to a degree) had been dictated by motives of purest friendship, to advance our cause or, at worst, to protect us from the otherwise disastrous results of our inexperienced policy, and followed with a detailed account of how the contemplation of our virtues had led him, step by step, to final conversion. He ended by exhibiting, with pardonable pride, the musket he had been given on his baptism, in accordance with our practice in such cases of supplementing the whole armour of faith with a weapon more tangible and usually more attractive to the aboriginal mind.

I gathered that the incursions of the Five Nations had become so frequent and formidable as to seriously alarm our host and convince him that his only hope now lay in help from our people, so that he was anxious to gain the favour of every Frenchman who

came his way. This conclusion has been strengthened by the events of later years; and conceding the worthlessness of himself and his tribe, it is little credit to us that the Nation of the Island was finally swept away by the fierce tide of invasion without an effort on our part to make it seem that an alliance with the French was a thing worth while.

Though they pressed us to stay with them for a time, there was nothing to be gained by doing so; but their pronounced friendliness gave me an idea which met with the full concurrence of Mlle. de Chatillon, and we asked them to provide us with an escort of a dozen able-bodied young Indians to whom we promised an ample reward on our arrival at Ville Marie de Montreal. Under these circumstances there was no scarcity of volunteers, the difficulty being rather to limit our escort to the desired number, and we congratulated ourselves on the prospect of a much safer and less laborious voyage than we had anticipated.

We had expected to leave Marie with her people; but when the time came to say farewell, she clung to the arm of Mademoiselle, and begged that she might be allowed to accompany her, promising, with more expression of emotion than is characteristic of her race, to be her faithful and industrious servant. She declared that since her husband was dead and she had no children we were her best and closest friends,

and urged her request so strongly that Mademoiselle turned to me in embarrassment.

"What do you think, M. Regnier?" she asked. "Would I do well to take her?"

"Why not, Mademoiselle?" I replied. "If, later, she tires of your employment, or you of her, she can return to her people with no great difficulty, and in the meantime you can no doubt teach her to be of use."

"Then she shall come!" declared Mlle. de Chatillon, with a readiness that showed clearly in which direction her own wishes inclined. I did not blame her for desiring the company of one of her own sex, since it was scarcely fitting that a young and beautiful maiden should travel alone with the rough company in which she found herself.

As for Marie, her satisfaction was intense, and she hastened to take up her accustomed place in our canoe, all eagerness to set forth. As I noted the expression of contentment that filled the face of the Indian woman, I could not but remark how fortunate they are who possess the charm of person and disposition that draws to them, without an effort, the esteem and affection of all with whom they come in contact. Such a gift is of infinitely more value than rank or wealth, and I have never known anyone more richly endowed with it than Mlle. de Chatillon.

There is little to tell of the remainder of our journey. The weather was warm and dry, and we travelled in comparative ease and safety. Some of the rapids we navigated in our canoes. When it was necessary to disembark, as at the cataracts and the more dangerous rapids, our sturdy companions carried our canoe and its contents on their shoulders while we walked unburdened behind them. Once, as we rounded a turn of the river, we were alarmed by a sudden and unexpected meeting with a small band of Iroquois, but their numbers were no greater than ours, and though they turned to pursue us, a few well placed shots seemed to convince them that there was more satisfaction to be gained, with less risk, by the resumption of their journey upstream than by continuing to seek an encounter with us.

This incident brought home to us a lively appreciation of the need for caution, and so vigilant did we become that when, a day or two later, we met the Hurons with whom we had set forth from Ste. Marie the year before, now on their way home armed with muskets and loaded with presents, we lay in hiding from them and they in wait for us, for several hours, until they reached the conclusion that we had evaded them and came near enough for us to recognize them. As we were now near the Island of Montreal and in the most dangerous stage of the journey, we prevailed

upon them, by the promise of additional rewards, to return with us.

Thus reinforced, we made a party sufficiently strong to travel boldly and without hesitation; nevertheless, it was with the greatest relief that we at last turned our canoes, one afternoon in May, into the little stream that debouches into the St. Lawrence at Ville Marie de Montreal.

Imagine, if you can, the welcome that met our arrival! The entire population of the settlement poured out in a body to greet us with cheers and shouts. Scarcely had we landed, when P. Dufour came running, bare-headed, with his black robe and white hair flying in the breeze, an incoherent flood of joy and thanksgiving on his lips. Closely following him came the Governor, with Mlle. Mance and Mme. de la Peltrie, who seized upon Mlle. de Chatillon in transports of enthusiasm, and thus attended, and surrounded by the surging crowd, we made our way to the fort, near the gate of which we met M. de Chatillon.

Whatever might have been his feelings on first hearing of his cousin's safe return, he had by now had a space of some few minutes in which to digest the news, and encountered her with a fair degree of composure. There are many who profess to be able to read a man's inmost thoughts in his behaviour and the expression of his features, but for my part I have

never laid claim to such nicety of discrimination, and though I watched him closely with much curiosity, I could discern in his mind little but a species of bewilderment and a mixture of conflicting emotions. For months he had regarded her as having perished. Undoubted as was the passion that had led him to follow her so ardently and so perseveringly, there had been no affinity of the mind, no bond of the spirit between them, and I found myself wondering whether the chain that had bound him had dissolved when the chilly hand of death had seemed to be laid upon it. His health, at least, had not declined; he was handsomer than ever, his carriage as erect, his attire no less sumptuous. That his desire for her was not extinguished,—or perhaps I should say that it was rekindled at the sight of her,—was clearly evident. But whereas, before, his behaviour had spoken of an unwilling yet impotent subjection to her whims, there was now in his deportment a certain smooth, indulgent urbanity; it was as if the utter wreck of the plans on which he had set his heart had developed in him a certain equanimity, just as to nobler souls a bereavement not seldom brings added strength of character and composure in the face of adversity. He had learned that he could live without her, and the knowledge endowed him with a measure of independence that manifested itself in a trace of bland indifference,

and in the well chosen and appropriate words in which he congratulated her upon her safe return.

This change was not lost upon the quick perception of Mlle. de Chatillon, and whereas she had been wont to meet his petulance with asperity, she now met his urbanity with smiling suavity.

Somewhat pensively I followed the eager, questioning group that surrounded Mademoiselle and escorted her to her quarters. I carried in my hand a bundle of her belongings, and though willing hands sought more than once to relieve me of it, I was loath to let it go, as if to do so would be to finally disburden myself of my charge. She was safe, and in the midst of her friends, and I would not have had it otherwise. In a day or two we should all return to Quebec and I should be free to go back to work on my farm. In the meantime, my protection was no longer needed; but I could at least carry her bundle.

Once or twice she looked about until her eyes rested on me, and when the ladies reached their door, she beckoned to me to enter with my burden. Marie, who had followed closely, also entered. Mademoiselle Mance and Mme. de la Peltrie were deeply interested in the Indian woman and led her to the room she was to occupy, leaving me for the moment alone with Mlle. de Chatillon. She regarded me thoughtfully, with a little smile.

"And so," she said, "you have brought me safely to the end of our journey."

"It seems so, Mademoiselle, I replied.

"And yet you are down-hearted. Are you not glad to be here?"

"More than glad, Mademoiselle."

"You do not look it," she persisted, "what is the matter?"

I shrugged my shoulders.

"Tell me!" she urged.

I laughed. "In truth," I said, "if there is one consideration that mars my contentment, it is a very selfish one,—to wit, that I shall no longer be privileged to enjoy the companionship that fortune has so kindly bestowed upon me of late."

"A poor excuse for melancholy," she rejoined lightly. "I shall judge the sincerity of your desire for my company by the frequency with which you seek it."

I shook my head. "You will be among your friends, and there will be no lack of those whose conversation is more enlivening than mine."

"True enough!" said Mademoiselle. "Were my thoughts bent upon entertainment only, I might look for it elsewhere, though indeed you are sometimes vastly more diverting than you think; but I am in the midst of perplexities, difficulties, dangers,—it is guid-

ance, and help, and protection that I need more than entertainment,—I need friends whom I can trust."

"I have learned," she added after a pause, "that you are a friend whom I can trust. I am not blind. I do not think it is by mere chance that you have been at hand to help me whenever I have been in trouble and to accompany me when I have gone into danger. I do not know why you have taken it upon you to watch over me and guard me, but I know that you have done so, and I thank you."

"I cannot deny, Mademoiselle, that I have taken a deep interest in your fortunes, and that I have followed them in the hope that I might be of service," I replied. "As for my reasons,—surely no further explanation is necessary than your own charm of person and disposition, which makes all men eager to serve you."

She laughed and blushed. "You are a courtly colonist," she declared. "Were your explanation less patly spoken I should deem it more credible and find it more embarrassing."

"I have no wish to embarrass you, Mademoiselle. But if at any time I can help you,—that is indeed my desire."

Our conversation was interrupted by the return of Mlle. Mance and Mme. de la Peltrie, and after a few minutes of further talk I took my leave.

CHAPTER XXIII

A FORTNIGHT later we were in Quebec, and I stood in the lower town near the water's edge, with P. Dufour, who had come to see me off to my island home. I paused for a moment's conversation with the priest.

"What now?" I said. "Must we at last revert to the humdrum of daily work?"

"All things considered, we are fortunate to be here to do so," he said.

"No doubt," I replied. "The prospect does not greatly appeal to me."

"Your adventures have made you restless," he remarked.

"Perhaps."

"I, too, am a trifle loath to settle down," he admitted, "and I think Mlle. de Chatillon has somewhat the same feeling."

"M. de Chatillon, at least, seems glad to be here," I said. "There is nothing of aimlessness in his mood. I should like to know what crafty plan he is turning over in his mind."

"You think he has some new plan?"

I nodded. "Tell me," I said, "did he learn from you the provisions which Mlle. de Chatillon had made for the disposal of her fortune in case of her death?"

"He did. Since we believed her to be dead, he sought, on our arrival at Ville Marie, to take charge of her belongings, as next of kin, and it became necessary to produce the will, in which she named me as trustee."

"And he became familiar with the terms of it?"

"Yes."

"How did he take the news?"

"Whatever resentment he felt he kept to himself, but it seemed to have a hardening effect upon him. Until then, he had appeared to be chastened by the disaster that had fallen upon us; the fate of his cousin was a sharper blow than he had ever before felt, and it served in a measure to strip off the envelope of selfishness with which his life of easy indulgence had surrounded him. It is hard to say how deeply he was touched; I fancy he was on the way to forget her aloofness and enshrine her in his memory as one who would ultimately have become his wife, and the influence of such a thought would doubtless have persisted until, sooner or later, it was displaced by some new interest. But when he learned that she had arranged that he should not be her heir,

—that he should not inherit even if all hope of finding M. de la Roux were ultimately to be abandoned,—when he learned, moreover, that she had had so little confidence in him that she had appointed me, a comparative stranger, to carry out her bequest,—it brought home to him how small a place he had occupied in her regard, and was as if she had returned from the grave to administer a final rebuff more galling than any to which he had submitted in her lifetime. To do him justice, I think this rebuff affected him more than did the material deprivation it carried with it."

"Did he made no protest?"

"None whatever, save to insist on scrutinizing the document for himself to see that it was in order. But from that time onward he made no further mention of her name, and the friendship that had grown out of our mutual unhappiness rapidly dissolved."

"Do you know whether he has upbraided her since our arrival?" I enquired.

"Not to my knowledge," replied the priest.

"He has some plan," I repeated. "He is playing a part. His present urbanity is assumed."

"I am inclined to agree with you," replied P. Dufour. "But after all, what can he do?"

"He has received convincing proof of the futility of his former methods, and realizes that if he is to

bring her to marry him or keep her fortune in the family it can only be done by a complete change in policy. He is pleased that Fortune has vouchsafed him another chance, and it is my opinion that having failed to succeed by patience coupled with importunity, he has it in mind to devise some scheme whereby he may apply compulsion."

"That may be," said the Jesuit thoughtfully, "but in these modern times compulsion is not easy to apply. In the days of our ancestors he might have ridden up in a coat of mail, with a troop of spearmen at his back, and carried her off to his castle in defiance of the King and the law. He cannot do so now."

"Nevertheless, I should like to be able to read his thoughts," I said. "We must watch him."

We stood in silence for a minute or so, until I took leave of him, exacting a promise that he would visit me ere long, and set sail for the Island of Orleans.

Be it poor and crude as it may, the spot a man has chosen for his home grows in his affection as he becomes settled in it, and it was with a certain warmth of emotion that I saw the familiar roof emerge from the gathering dusk. Coming as I did, unannounced and unexpected, I looked for no welcome, and it was therefore with the greater pleasure that I saw my four men awaiting me at the landing stage. They had

recognized my approaching sail, and their demonstration of delight at my return was most cheering and aroused me from my somewhat despondent mood; I greeted them heartily with the pleasing realization that these faithful fellows were not mere hirelings, but staunch friends. As we walked up the slope they pressed me with a hundred eager questions, and when we entered the house and I praised them for keeping it neat and clean in my absence, their honest faces beamed with pardonable pride.

Regardless of economy, we lit half a dozen candles, and we sat and talked at length, while they gave me an account of their stewardship which was most creditable. I had left a small store of good liquor which (to their honour be it said) was still untouched, and I poured it with a free hand. We enjoyed a very comforting evening, not without hilarity, and when they departed to their quarters, I watched their none too steady steps with the reflection that while P. Dufour would assuredly have disapproved such indulgence, it was not without justification under the circumstances.

CHAPTER XXIV

PROPERLY cultivated, the soil of New France is of richness unsurpassed, and if the severity of its Winters limits the number of fruits and vegetables that can be grown with success, it also limits the number of plagues and pests that assail them, so that those plants that are suited to the climate reach a perfection seldom attained elsewhere. This thought was brought to my mind as I stood in the kitchen garden a few days after my return and saw about me raspberries and currants and gooseberries, glistening yellow beans and peas with great fat pods, to say nothing of carrots and beets and such humbler vegetables. Though we had experienced little difficulty in finding subsistence on our travels, we had come by no such delicacies as these, and I wished that Mlle. de Chatillon and P. Dufour could be with me to enjoy them. But since they were not it occurred to me that it would not be out of place to carry each of them a bucolic gift of garden produce, and the plan commended itself the more that it would afford an opportunity to see and talk with them both.

Accordingly, that afternoon, I put in the bottom

of my boat four goodly baskets of the best I had, and scudded before a favouring breeze across the sunlit waters of the basin. Entering the mouth of the little river St. Charles, which is navigable for small craft at high tide, I soon found myself at the gate of the enclosure that surrounded the Jesuit Mission house. I stepped ashore with two of the baskets, and was met at the door by P. Dufour himself, who had seen me enter the gate. Nothing would do but he must call his brother missionaries to see what I had brought. Most of them I knew of old, and since it was the first time we had met since my return our greetings were of the heartiest and they besought me to stay and take my evening meal with them, but I explained that the errand that had brought me to the town was but half done, and I must be gone. P. Dufour escorted me to the river's edge.

"Sit down a moment, my son," he said, as we reached the bank, "there is a matter I should like to mention to you, a matter in which I am deeply interested and which will, I imagine, not be without interest for you."

We seated ourselves side by side and I listened to hear what he had to say.

"It concerns Mlle. de Chatillon," he began. "She is in receipt of displeasing and disquieting news."

"News?" I asked, "from whence?"

"From France. As you know, the ship St. Joseph came in the day after our return. On board was a certain M. Simon, a notary, from Riom in Auvergne, who is sent by the court to seek Mlle. de Chatillon and obtain from her a deposition setting forth her reasons, if any, why her uncle should not be appointed as the legal guardian of her person and her estate."

"You amaze me!" I exclaimed, incredulous. "Mademoiselle is of age, and manifestly competent to direct her affairs! Surely no justification can be found for such an appointment!"

"It seems absurd," agreed P. Dufour, "yet stranger things have happened, and the satisfaction that shows in the expression of M. de Chatillon renders me uneasy."

"Aho!" I said. "So that is the form of compulsion he thinks to apply! I wonder how long it has been brewing."

"Apparently her uncle made application about a year ago."

"A precious family!" I said. "It puzzles me that one member of it should be so noble and these others so base."

"Mlle. de Chatillon is upset by the thought of losing her independence," continued the priest. "She feels that it is an obvious effort to prevent her from carrying out the plans on which she has set her heart."

"Do you think she would see me?" I asked. "I have brought these to give to her." I pointed to the other two baskets in the boat.

"To you, who live in the midst of such abundance, the gift may seem trifling," said the Jesuit, "but to me and to Mademoiselle, there could be nothing more welcome. I am sure she will be more than pleased at your thoughtfulness."

"We shall talk this matter over further when I see you again," I said; "in the meantime I must go."

Brooding over the information given me by P. Dufour, I sailed down into the St. Lawrence and tied my boat to the wharf and ascended the rock with a basket in either hand. They were heavy and the way was steep, so that by the time I reached the plateau I was hot and out of breath. Not wishing to present myself to the Ursulines and to Mlle. de Chatillon in such condition, I turned aside to rest in the shade of a clump of trees and bushes at the edge of the cliff, and there came quite unexpectedly upon Mademoiselle herself. She was seated at the base of a tree, looking eastward over the river, with her chin in her hand. My coming startled her a trifle, but when she recognized me she welcomed me most cordially, and made me sit down.

"This is like old times," she said. "What have you in those baskets?"

"A humble gift for you, Mademoiselle, if you will accept it," I replied, and opened the baskets for her inspection.

"The kindly fruits of the earth in due season," she said. "This is indeed an acceptable present. But even more acceptable is the fact that you have come to see me. At the very moment of your arrival I was wishing for your advice and counsel."

"About this latest move of Monsieur your uncle."

"You have heard of it? But from whom?" she asked.

"From Père Dufour. I have this afternoon seen him," I replied.

"Is it not scandalous!" she exclaimed indignantly. "Do you know on what grounds my uncle seeks to be appointed as my guardian?"

"No. On what grounds?"

"On the grounds that I am incapable of looking after myself or my property,—that I am weak-minded,—imbecile,—in short, that I am insane!"

"A most sinister scheme!" I said. "It is just what I should have expected of him."

She looked at me in astonishment. "You speak as though you knew him!" she said.

"He was the leading spirit in plotting the wrong to the family of St. Étienne de la Roux that you are now seeking to undo. As you know, P. Dufour has told

me of it. One would naturally expect he would be loath to see the fruits of his villainy pass out of the family."

"That is so," she agreed, thoughtfully. "Grievously as he sinned, my poor father at least felt the pricking of conscience. But my uncle is not only unrepentant,—he is self-righteous."

"This lawyer who has been sent to see you,—M. Simon,—did you see him?"

"Yes."

"What did he have to say?"

"He asked me questions,—mostly about my plans, and the will I had made, and how soon I expected to return to France."

"And you told him?"

"I answered his questions in as reasonable and as truthful a manner as I could."

"Did he seem friendly, Mademoiselle?"

"He was very precise and solemn and formal. But I know that as between myself and my uncle he will favour my uncle, who has for years afforded him much remunerative employment. The very fact that it is he who has been chosen to examine me causes me to fear lest my uncle has made such progress with his application that it will be almost hopeless for me to resist him."

"Have you thought of any plan, Mademoiselle?"

She shook her head. "I am at a loss to know what to do. I thought at first of returning to France at once,—this coming week,—in the same ship as M. Simon. But before I mentioned the idea, he urged it on me so strongly and persistently that I concluded it would be better for me to stay here."

"This M. Simon," I said, "where is he to be found?"

"At the Inn."

"I think, Mademoiselle, with your permission, I should like to see him and have a talk with him."

"By all means. Shall I give you a note of introduction?"

"I shall dispense with an introduction, and hope that he has not even heard that I am a friend of yours. And in the meantime, lest he should by chance see us together, I shall leave you here, and when I have delivered the baskets, I shall go down to the Inn and endeavour to make the acquaintance of this worthy notary."

"You saved me from the Indians," said Mlle. de Chatillon. "Can you also save me from the lawyers?"

"That remains to be seen," I replied. "I would that you had some one more astute to undertake the task."

"Had you not come, I should have sent for you,"

she said. "Does it not seem strange that you, whom I insulted so grievously when first we met, should have come to be my trusted confidant and chief reliance when I am in trouble?"

"You did not insult me, Mademoiselle," I replied.

"Did I not accuse you of concealment,—of telling me half truths?"

"That is not necessarily an insult," I said. "And now you have forgiven me."

"Indeed I have," she answered, with a smile, "though I have a suspicion that there is much you still conceal from me,—such secrets, for example, as the real reason for your interest in my welfare. I do not know why you do it. For my part, I have concealed nothing from you."

I laughed. "That, Mademoiselle, is because you have nothing to conceal," I replied, and took my leave, promising to let her hear further from me in a day or two.

CHAPTER XXV

Simon, the notary, was a man of low stature, thick-set, bullet-headed, of a high complexion. I recognized him readily by the garb he wore. He was seated at a small table in the common room of the Inn, perspiring freely (it was the hottest hour of a hot day), and viewing with disfavour the unruly carousals of a group of tipsy mariners who filled the air with their loud oaths and senseless laughter. Without appearing to seek his company, but rather to sit apart from the others, I took a chair that would be close enough to him to permit of a conversation, should opportunity arise. When Antoine, the Innkeeper, came to take my order, I jestingly asked him why he did not keep his guests in better order.

"Why should I be unkind to them?" he replied. "When they are ashore, let them have a good time. A day or two and they will be aboard ship again and working hard."

"I would that I could go with them," I said, "I should like to revisit my home in Auvergne."

Out of the corner of my eye I could see M. Simon

look up at this mention of the province from which he came.

"New France is a goodly land," I went on, "but the Winters are cold and the Summers are hot. In Auvergne it is different. You are from Normandy, Antoine, and that is a fine country, but give me Auvergne, say I, and the people of Auvergne,—I should like to be among them again for a while,—some day, Antoine, I shall leave my farm and go back. Bring me a bottle of your best wine, Antoine, and let it be cold."

While he was gone, I took my pipe, and filling it with tobacco, addressed myself to M. Simon.

"Will it annoy you, Sir, if I light my pipe?" I enquired.

"By no means," he replied. "It is a curious custom and interests me greatly. What pleasure do you find in it?"

"It has a soothing effect, and allays the irritation which one feels at trifling annoyances, such as the heat, and the flies, and the noises those lads are making."

"A useful habit," he said, with a grimace. "I could well imagine a man taking it up if he had long to stay here."

As he spoke Antoine set my wine before me.

"Since you do not yet smoke tobacco, Sir, will you

at least join me in a glass of this wine? Antoine, my friend, another glass."

Nothing loath, he let me pour him a glass of wine.

"I heard you say you are from Auvergne," he said. "So am I. And if you wish you were there, I too wish I were. Let us drink to our native province!"

I took up my glass. "Why, this is indeed a happy chance!" I exclaimed. "To the province of Auvergne!" And we drained our glasses.

The ice thus broken, we chatted together for a time, until our bottle was empty.

"Do you plan to stay here, Master Simon," I enquired, "or are you to return to France?"

"I am to sail in a day or so."

"I am sorry to hear that," I said. "But look you, Master Simon, this Inn is no place for comfort on a hot Summer day, and since our acquaintance is to be short let us make the most of it. It is cool on the river and I have my boat here. You must come with me and spend the evening at my home on the Island of Orleans, and I shall give you better wine than this. What say you?"

He yielded readily enough to my invitation, and without waiting for him to change his mind, I carried him off with me and we were soon afloat.

There are few pastimes more enjoyable than to sail in a small boat on a Summer evening, with a

cooling breeze on the after quarter and the ripples babbling beneath the bow. Perceiving the manifest satisfaction which M. Simon experienced in this simple relaxation, I felt less compunction in regard to my dealings with him, reflecting that in exchange for such information as I might covertly gather from his remarks, I should at least afford him a few hours of pleasure.

He was not unappreciative. "My faith!" said he, "I did not think there was such comfort as this to be had here. Since I left my home one annoyance has followed on the heels of another without cease. It was miserable enough to be galled by the saddle on my way to the sea, for I am no horseman; but on top of that we were twice attacked by thieves and passed through a district infested with plague. Simpleton that I was, I thought when I was safely on board ship that my troubles were at an end for the time being, but we were barely out of sight of land when I discovered my mistake; when the waves began to toss us about I took to my berth, and there I lay, groaning and retching, for days together. I have no love for the sea!"

He shuddered reminiscently.

"And then," he continued, "when I arrived here and thought to rest in peace for a short space, I am put in a sweltering little room under the roof of

yonder Inn, and even if the heat would let me sleep, the night is made hideous by the noisy bedlam set up by the seamen whose resort it is. I am at the end of my patience, and my irritation is increased by the fact that the business on which I have come, though important, is of an uncongenial nature."

"It must surely be important, to bring a gentleman of your standing so long a distance for so short a visit," I ventured.

"It is indeed, M. Regnier," he answered complacently. "It concerns the estates of an ancient and wealthy family. But, as you know, we men of the law must keep our mouths shut; were it not so, I might tell you a curious tale."

Not wishing to put him on his guard, I forbore to press him, and feigning lack of interest, changed the subject. It was not until an hour or so later, when we were seated in easy chairs in the garden, and the sun had set, and the stars had come out, and our fourth bottle of wine stood half empty on the table beside us, that I reverted to it. For the fourth or fifth time (or it may have been the tenth) he was dwelling on the beauty and fragrance of our surroundings and the goodness of the wine and my hospitality.

"I could ask nothing better than to stay with you all summer, Friend Regnier," he said.

"Why not?" I asked. "You would be welcome. There will be another ship sailing for France in the Autumn."

"It is impossible, my friend," he replied sadly. "The business on which I have come can not be delayed."

"It must be strange business that is so important, yet can be so quickly accomplished."

"It is strange business, my friend," he said, wagging his head impressively. "It is the strangest business on which I have been engaged in the whole of my experience."

"You interest me," I said, and poured him another glass of wine.

His native caution stirred within him for the last time.

"It is growing late," he said. "I must not abuse your hospitality by staying too long."

"Nonsense, Master Simon! The night is young yet, and your conversation is more interesting than any I have enjoyed for many a day."

He settled back once more in his chair, and sipped dreamily at the glass I had poured for him.

"What was I saying?" he asked.

"You were speaking about some curious and unusual matter,—some strange business that brings you to New France."

"Ah, yes. Quite so. After all, I do not know why I should not tell you of it, since the young lady herself knows of my visit and of her uncle's application to the courts."

"What young lady?"

"Mlle. de Chatillon. But perhaps you know her."

I nodded. "There is also a M. de Chatillon here," I said.

"He is her cousin," said M. Simon.

"He is a man of handsome appearance," I said.

"Nevertheless, his appearance makes small appeal to Mlle. de Chatillon. He has for years sought her hand in marriage, but without success."

"That is something which often happens. Has he called you to this country to plead his cause with her?"

"Perhaps my story would be more coherent were I to tell it to you from the beginning."

The thought came to me that if he made a lengthy tale of it, it might be less rather than more coherent before he was through, but I saw no reason to discourage his volubility.

"Know then, M. Regnier, that there were until lately in Auvergne, two brothers of the name of De Chatillon. The elder, M. Giles de Chatillon, the father of the young M. de Chatillon whom you have seen in Quebec, is still living; the younger brother

died some three or four years ago, leaving a daughter, the Mlle. de Chatillon of whom we have spoken. As her mother died when she was a child, she is an orphan.

"In view of her unquestioned beauty and amiability, and the fact that her father bequeathed to her the lands and château that formerly belonged to the ancient family of St. Étienne de la Roux, a property of notable value, it might have been expected that, failing to grant the suit of her handsome cousin, she would in due course contract in some other quarter the brilliant marriage to which her beauty and rank and wealth pointed.

"Judge then, how disappointed were her relatives and friends when, on the death of her father, she withdrew herself, in a manner, from the world, and for some months played the part of a recluse. At first they deemed it to be merely filial grief at the death of her father, and looked for it to pass off. But later it came to their knowledge that she had instituted a search for the Vicomte de la Roux, a young man (now indeed, verging on middle age) who inherited from his father, the late Vicomte de la Roux, nothing but an empty title, the lands which supported it having passed into the hands of Mlle. de Chatillon's father.

"Puzzled by this manifestation on her part, and

with forebodings that the loss of her father had affected her reason, her relatives had in contemplation the necessity of instituting a closer scrutiny of her actions when she amazed them by suddenly setting forth, alone, for New France. Her cousin followed in all haste, and overtook her at La Rochelle, the day before her ship sailed. He urged her to reconsider her plan to cross the ocean, but she was obdurate; since she was of age and her own mistress, and well supplied with money, he could exert no compulsion, and the matter ended by his sailing with her. If he hoped to persuade her to return his hope has had little fruition; well nigh three years have elapsed, and she is still here and shows no intention of sailing for France. In the meantime he has travelled with her hundreds of leagues and they have shared the most distressing hardships and hairbreadth escapes. Mlle. de Chatillon seems to have quite lost that sense of caution that leads the normal young woman to shrink from wild scenes and rough company and perilous ventures."

"Perhaps she never had it," I ventured.

M. Simon laughed fatuously. "It is ingrained in every woman," he declared. "No, my friend, it is not the love of adventure that moves her. It is no reasonable motive, but rather a wild delusion which leads her to seek this Vicomte de la Roux

that she may pour upon his astonished head the whole of her worldly possessions, the fruit of a lifetime of economy and endeavour on the part of her poor father."

I puffed rapidly at my pipe, but said nothing to interrupt him.

"As for this Vicomte de la Roux, when his father had dissipated his fortune and then died, he took to a wandering life, and is said to have come to New France. But, as you and I know, a man without substance, who no doubt inherited his father's instability of character, is liable to drift here, there or anywhere, and to search for him is to chase a mere will o' the wisp.

"Mlle. de Chatillon has, I understand, made no secret of the fact that she seeks him, and were he actually in New France, he would doubtless have heard of it long ago and come forward to accept the largesse that kind fortune has put it into the head of Mlle. de Chatillon to give him."

"I suppose that is what one might expect of the unstable and impecunious son of a foolish and improvident father," I said.

"Beyond a doubt, my dear M. Regnier!" exclaimed the notary, with an air of conviction that made his own opinion quite clear. "The very fact that Mlle. de Chatillon has lingered so long over her search in

this sparsely settled colony is in itself an evidence of lack of the power to reason logically."

"On the other hand," I ventured, "is not that very lack of logic, in a woman, a sign of normal mentality?"

He laughed uproariously. "You have a pretty wit!" he cried. "But after all, that is a cynic's argument, which would not have weight in a serious court of law. No, my dear friend, it is the other way about."

"But what have courts of law to do with it?" I enquired.

"Why, that is where the matter touches me," he replied. "While her cousin has followed her to try the effects of persuasion, her uncle has set on foot proceedings that will vest in him the power of compulsion. When young M. de Chatillon wrote his father from New France, informing him of his lack of success in holding Mlle. de Chatillon back from her mad ventures, the elder gentleman decided that affairs had reached a point where patience was no longer to be counted a virtue, and applied to the courts to be appointed guardian of her person and custodian of her wealth."

"And to what extent has he succeeded in his application?" I enquired.

"It is all but granted," replied M. Simon. "My

visit is the merest formality,—though no formality for me," he added ruefully. "I had no desire to come, but I could not well refuse. Though I might have avoided the task by requesting the court to send another, I could not afford to disregard the wishes of so influential and wealthy a client as M. de Chatillon. And furthermore, as it happens, my coming has resulted in the disclosure of final evidence which places the necessity of a guardian beyond dispute."

"And what is that?"

"At one stage of her adventures, Mlle. de Chatillon was given up for lost, and when her cousin, who by the merest chance escaped from sharing her apparent fate, undertook to gather together her effects with a view to taking them back to France, he learned to his astonishment that she had made an eccentric will providing that the whole of her property was to be held in trust for this M. de la Roux, for a period of ten years, and if by the end of that period he had not appeared, it was to be devoted to the support and extension of the Ursuline convent here in Quebec."

"And you think that is final evidence that she needs a guardian?"

"Absolutely final," he said.

I poured him another glass of wine. "No doubt you have seen the young lady," I said, "does her conversation seem to you to be irrational?"

"On the face of it," he replied, "one would think her quite sane. But there is a strange and dangerous form of madness known to physicians as the 'fixed idea.' Of those so affected some think they are the victims of persecution. Others have the idea of greatness,—one thinks himself the King of Africa,—another thinks himself the Pope, or the Angel Gabriel. In the case of Mlle. de Chatillon it is the idea that the riches of the family of St. Étienne were taken by her father fraudulently from the late Vicomte de la Roux, and from this idea springs her desire to make restitution to his son, if she can find him, or if not, to consecrate her wealth by devoting it to a pure and unselfish use. It is a sad case, M. Regnier, and it goes against my wishes to take the part of seeming unkindness that is really in her best interests."

Saying which he sighed heavily and took a long drink.

"No doubt you are satisfied that the idea is a pure delusion?" I said.

"Why surely! M. de Chatillon, while not without business acumen, is among the most substantial and highly respected men of Auvergne, and his lamented brother bore the same enviable reputation. Any thought of improper conduct on the part of either of them would not be for a moment entertained."

"Then there is in your opinion no method whereby

Mlle. de Chatillon can escape the tutelage of her uncle?"

"None whatever. That is, unless she consents to marry her cousin."

"That would be an idea," I said. "In such case, no doubt M. de Chatillon senior would withdraw his application?"

"Assuredly."

"A happy issue out of her difficulty," I said. "But should she persist in her refusal,—what then?"

"Why, that remains to be seen," he replied.

I poured him still another glass of wine; he quaffed it with an unsteady hand.

"Is there no other way of escape for her?" I asked. "What if, for example, she were herself to enter the Ursuline sisterhood?"

"She could not do so now. It would be set aside."

"I warrant that if she were to employ a sagacious man of the law like yourself, you could find her a way out, Master Simon," I said, with a laugh.

"Perhaps I might. Perhaps I might," he replied sleepily.

"Under such conditions, what would you advise her to do?" I asked.

"Why,—as a matter of fact, and between ourselves, M. Regnier,—strictly between ourselves, you understand, M. Regnier,—I should tell her that if

she could find another man to her taste and marry him out of hand, he would become her guardian de facto, and were the ceremony carried out before the decree of guardianship arrived to prevent it, she could tell her uncle to go whistle."

While I pondered his words he fell asleep, and it was with difficulty that I roused him to accompany me to the bed which I had in readiness. The next morning he slept long and late, and when, that afternoon, I set him ashore in the town, he parted from me with unstinted cordiality, declaring that I was a man after his own heart. So far as I could judge by guarded allusions to the latter part of our conversation the night before, he had no recollection of it.

CHAPTER XXVI

It was still early in the afternoon when I said good-bye to M. Simon, and I turned my steps to the Jesuit Mission House. By good fortune I there found P. Dufour, and told him the substance of my conversation with the notary of Riom.

After gravely rebuking me (as in duty bound) for the means I had taken of unsealing M. Simon's tongue, he turned his attention with the deepest concern to the information thus elicited. We discussed the situation in its various aspects for close upon an hour with little result, and ended by setting forth to call upon Mademoiselle de Chatillon and take her into our counsels.

Mademoiselle received us with an air of eager anxiety which showed more plainly than words how heavily the threatened aggression of her uncle weighed upon her mind, and I was distressed at the thought that we had come to bring her but scanty comfort. P. Dufour opened the conversation.

"Since I was last speaking with you," he said, "we have come into possession of somewhat more com-

plete information in regard to the business which has brought this notary to New France, and the plans of your uncle. This information was obtained by M. Regnier, who succeeded in becoming acquainted with the notary yesterday, and had a conversation of some length with him last night."

"M. Regnier left me with that purpose," said Mademoiselle, with a smile. "It is a proof of his engaging personality that he found himself so soon on terms of intimacy with an entire stranger."

"I cannot approve of the method followed by M. Regnier in this instance," said P. Dufour. "To put it bluntly, he induced the man to accompany him to his home on the Island of Orleans, and there plied him with liquor until he had succeeded in loosening his tongue."

"Let me say that I have no compunction whatever at having done so," I said. "The notary is a glib and covetous knave who lends himself without scruple to the villainous plot of a rich employer, and he is fair game for anyone who can cozen him of his secrets. How honest he is you may judge for yourself, Mademoiselle, when I tell you that after seeing you and discoursing with you, he fully intends to return to France and declare on oath that he is satisfied you are insane. He has no more claim to fair play in this matter than a wolf!"

A glint of anger at the news I brought shone in the eyes of Mlle. de Chatillon.

"I perceive, Sir, that you are more a man of the world than I had thought, and are not without means of coping with lawyers as well as with savages. But I must confess that in this instance I seem to have more in common with you than with Père Dufour, and I am ready and anxious to hear what you have learned."

"There is little encouragement in it," I said. "In fact, from the viewpoint of your uncle and of M. Simon, you truly are insane. Your insanity is proved, first by the fact that you believe your father to have been party to a fraud,—second by your endeavours to find M. de la Roux,—third, by your contempt of danger,—fourth, by your still entertaining the idea that M. de la Roux may be in New France,—and fifth, by your making a will leaving the estates of La Roux to a religious institution. M. Simon has even diagnosed the precise form of mental ailment from which you suffer; he says it is the type of madness known to physicians as the 'fixed idea.'"

"It seems incredible," said Mlle. de Chatillon, "that there should be a possibility that my independence and the control of the property which the law recognizes as mine will be taken away from me on such grounds!"

"There is, unfortunately, more than a possibility of it," I said. "I questioned the notary very closely as to what success had been met with by your uncle, and gathered from him that the matter is already practically settled, and that his visit to New France is, in a manner, a mere formality."

"Then what am I to do?" cried Mademoiselle, in dismay. "There is surely some way of escape!"

"Since M. Simon no doubt had a part in devising the plan, I judged that he had canvassed with your uncle the various methods by which you might evade it; I think he told me of the only adverse chance that has entered their calculations, when he said that you might defeat them by being married before the decree is received here,—either to your cousin M. de Chatillon, in which case the application will be withdrawn,—or to someone else, in which case your husband will become your guardian to the exclusion of your uncle."

"But what if I enter the Ursuline Sisterhood?" asked Mlle. de Chatillon. "Will not that protect me?"

"I asked him that very question," I replied. "He seemed quite sure that your action in that respect would be set aside, since it would not partake of the irrevocable nature of a marriage."

"I am satisfied that my cousin is privy to this

scheme, and for that reason alone I should refuse to marry him, even were I otherwise inclined to do so, which I am not," declared Mademoiselle.

"Then perhaps you might think of someone else," I ventured.

"Perhaps I might hire some man to marry me!" she responded tartly. "I would have you know that I am not inclined to leap out of the frying pan into the fire!"

"No indeed!" said P. Dufour, shaking his gray head gravely. "A marriage is a serious matter, not to be lightly undertaken for reasons of mere convenience."

We sat for a time in gloomy silence, pondering the problem set before us.

"We must think of a plan," said Mademoiselle, with determination. "Fortunately, there is some little time in which to turn around. It will be late in the Summer before we have further news from France."

"In the meantime, we must pray for guidance," said P. Dufour.

"Yes," replied Mademoiselle. "To begin with, I think we are agreed that it would be wiser for me to remain here than to return to France as M. Simon suggests."

"By all means!" I said. "That would be most dangerous."

"It is possible," she said, thoughtfully, "that I might be able to convince them of my being rational."

I shook my head. "Can you produce unquestioned evidence of the true nature of the transaction between your father, your uncle, and the late Vicomte de la Roux?"

"I have only my father's word for it," replied Mademoiselle.

"That would not protect you," I said, "you would be at too great a disadvantage."

"Had I no other reason for staying here," she answered, "it would be sufficient that I have two such faithful friends to take my part. From you, Father, I shall gain hope and courage and patience, and from you, M. Regnier,—from you, I shall look for some well considered, adroit and sagacious stroke of policy, the outcome of much tobacco smoke, that will put my enemies to rout."

"I shall do my best, Mademoiselle," I said. "In the meantime, have I your permission to bring you more vegetables?"

She laughed. "When will you come?" she asked.

"A week from to-day."

"You will be more than welcome," she said. "If it is a fine day you may find me where we met the other afternoon. Perhaps by that time you will have a plan to suggest."

With a few further words of encouragement, and a cheerfulness that was more pretended than real, P. Dufour and I took our leave, and I returned to my island home, absorbed in dubious study of this latest aspect of a problem that had previously been sufficiently intricate.

CHAPTER XXVII

In the week that followed, I had sufficient food for reflection. Again and again I turned over in my mind the outstanding facts of the case. This much was plain, that Mlle. de Chatillon was in grave danger of losing not only her fortune but also her independence, and that she had come into this position by reason of her efforts to do justice to the Vicomte de la Roux. From this danger it was my duty to free her at all costs. Plan after plan I studied and dismissed as impracticable; always I found myself thrown back again to the consideration of an expedient which, bizarre as it was, seemed to offer the only chance of relief from a situation otherwise intolerable.

But still I hesitated and hesitated, and my mind was by no means made up even when, on the appointed day, I sought her haunt on the brow of the cliff and laid my offering of garden produce before her. On this occasion I had brought with me a few roses. She took one of them from out the bed of damp moss with which I had surrounded them to keep them fresh, and held it lovingly in her hand, scenting its fragrance with a smile and a sigh.

"Grave and dispassionate as you are, M. Regnier, you have a rare gift of sentiment. How did you know that these roses would stir me to laugh and to weep, were I to yield to the impulse which they arouse?"

"I knew that you would like them, Mademoiselle, because your experience has of late been starved and bare of such things,—because you have had nothing but trouble and danger and anxiety, whose life should of right have been all sunshine and music and roses."

She shook her head. "That would be too much to expect," she said. "I have many compensations, not the least of which is the sympathy of my good friends; but this threat of compulsion and restraint is insufferable."

I made no reply, and we sat for a time in silence. It was one of those glittering June days when the climate of New France is at its best,—when Summer has reached the height of its first fullness, and the lush grass is hidden with daisies and buttercups and sweet-scented clover, and the busy hum of the honey bees is borne on the rustling breezes. Stretching far away to the eastward, the rippling blue of the river reflected the misty blue of the mountains, the radiant blue of the sky.

To all this I was not unresponsive,—yet as I recall the scene, the river and sky and mountains seem but as a painted background to the dainty, disconsolate

figure of the lovely and high-hearted maiden in whom the nobility of her mother shone so brightly, and on whom the sin of her father rested so heavily. She had fallen into a reverie, and though her eyes were on the rose she held in her hand, I could guess that her thoughts were of her home at La Roux in Auvergne.

When her day-dream had run its course, she turned to me and enquired whether my meditations had brought forth fruit. Yet the suggestion that was floating in my mind seemed so pitiful, so unacceptable, so fantastic, that I hesitated to give it utterance, and asked her if she had thought of no plan of her own.

"Indeed," she said, "save as a last resort, there is nothing that occurs to me. I might take refuge among the Dutch or English. Or perhaps," she added with a laugh, "if I could induce you to leave your farm once again, we might return with Marie to our cabin in the wilderness,—they could scarcely follow us there."

I shook my head. "Should the time come when such a flight is necessary, I shall not fail you, Mademoiselle. But it is your property that your uncle seeks to take into his custody as much as your person, and if it were sequestered as it doubtless would be, your purposes would be frustrated and your personal freedom would be all that would be left to you."

"Even so," replied Mlle. de Chatillon, "I shall be little worse off than I should have been had I found the Vicomte de la Roux and surrendered my fortune to him. And if, as you judge, my relatives are more interested in my wealth than in me, they may then cease to persecute me, and let me take refuge in a convent unhindered."

"I should be sorry to hear of that," I said.

"Then what alternative have you to offer? Your fertility of invention is my last resource."

"Look you, Mademoiselle," I said. "Might not one devote a moment's further consideration to the remedy suggested by M. Simon in his cups?"

"What is there to consider? My cousin, M. de Chatillon, I will not marry under any consideration. Am I to throw away my last shred of modesty, my last vestige of pride, and openly seek a husband whose one qualification is that he is prepared to wed me out of hand?"

"In sooth, Mademoiselle, you might set up that qualification and still have choice of nine out of ten of all the single gentlemen of New France."

"The best of them I could not profess to love. I should be unworthy of the worst of them were I to defraud him of that love which every man has a right to expect of the woman he weds. A marriage without love would be intolerable."

"It might be less so were the element of passion dispensed with by both parties," I said. "Doubtless you have heard of the affair of Mme. de la Peltrie and M. de Bernières."

She nodded. "That was a case in which by a pretended marriage she evaded the efforts of her relatives to compel her to enter into a real one. But this case is different. No pretended marriage would avail me."

"You have heard, too, of the marriage of Mlle. de Boulogne with M. d'Ailleboust, who is now at Montreal. To a casual observer they seem to find their state far from intolerable."

"You preach a strange doctrine, M. Regnier. I doubt if P. Dufour would give it countenance."

"In both the cases I have instanced the Church gave not only countenance but encouragement."

"That is true," she replied, thoughtfully. "But after all, we are speaking of impossibilities. There is here no M. de Bernières, no M. d'Ailleboust. But perhaps," she added with a smile, "perhaps you have thought of some suitable gentleman, who is willing to play their part,—to surrender his freedom that I may enjoy mine, and to wed a maiden declared by the courts to be insane, without hope of being enriched by either her affection or her wealth."

I made no answer, but sat silent until she repeated

her question. "Have you thought of someone?" she asked.

"I fear I may offend you, Mademoiselle, by the impertinence of my suggestion."

"Nonsense!"

"Why then," I said, "I have busied myself in your affairs during the past week to the extent of finding a man,—sober-minded and middle-aged,—who is sufficiently interested in the defeat of your uncle's plans to offer you such protection as his name may afford,—of whom, if you marry him, you can see as much or as little as you please,—who has no eye to your possessions and who, in his capacity as your husband, would make no use of his authority to prevent you from giving them to M. de la Roux if you find him or to the Ursulines if you do not,—who would in such case raise no impediment to hinder you from entering their order, or would, on the other hand, gladly welcome you to his home,—and who would, moreover, offer no objection to the annulment of the marriage at a later date should a dispensation be obtained."

"In other words," said Mademoiselle, "a marriage of convenience,—my convenience."

"Precisely."

She remained in silent thought for a long time.

"This,—this friend of yours, who is willing to

enter into such an arrangement,—he may be middle-aged, but as for being sober-minded,—no, I do not think you could truthfully call him sober-minded."

"More sober-minded than you think, Mademoiselle."

"He must be interesting," she said, "I should like to know him."

"You do know him, Mademoiselle."

"Then who is he?"

"Myself."

"I thought as much," she said, and again fell into silence, which I did not disturb. After a time I looked up and found her regarding me intently.

"I should hardly call you middle-aged," she observed.

"If you were to take off your beard it would be an improvement," she added.

"That, Mademoiselle, would be to sacrifice comfort and convenience to mere appearance."

"You speak as though you would never do that. And yet you offer to sacrifice much more merely to oblige a damsel in distress.

"What do I offer to sacrifice?"

"Your independence. Perhaps your comfort and convenience. Suppose, for instance, I were to accept your offer, and were later thrown back upon you as my sole recourse."

"I should be rewarded by the pleasure of your company, Mademoiselle. And I should have the privilege of pointing to the most beautiful woman I have ever seen, and saying 'Behold my wife.' "

"But if you tired of that distinction? You have just explained that you prefer the useful to the beautiful. What if you desired someone to cook your meals?"

"Were that the worst to be feared, I should have less hesitation in urging you to undertake the adventure."

"Indeed, Sir! What worse do you fear?"

"In following the course I have suggested you would be inviting censure from many quarters,—and what is more trying, ridicule. You would be held to have married far beneath you. Your relatives would be bitter and your friends might be cold."

She tossed her head with a gesture of disdain that was peculiarly attractive.

"My relatives and friends!" she repeated. "I have already heard from them!"

"There are doubtless other aspects of the matter which you are far better fitted to judge than I."

"There is one aspect of the matter which I am better fitted to judge than you," she observed, with a mischievous smile, "and my judgment is that you are the most diverting suitor that has ever crossed my

horizon. Could I be sure that you would prove to be as entertaining a husband, I declare I should be tempted to accept your proposal out of hand."

"It is a serious matter, Mademoiselle," I said.

She laughed outright. "That is what makes it so amusing," she replied.

I rose to take my leave. "Think it over, Mademoiselle," I said. "There is no hurry at the moment, and my offer stands good."

I bowed, and was turning to go when she too rose and held out her hand.

"If your proposal of marriage is the most unusual I have received it is also the most unselfish, and it may please you to know that you are the only man from whom I would take it into consideration. And in your new capacity, as a suitor, M. Regnier," she said gravely, but with merriment lurking in her eyes, "you may kiss my hand."

As I stooped to touch with my lips the exquisitely white and delicate fingers that lay so warm and soft in mine, my emotions were stirred at the thought of her,—brave, true-hearted, high-spirited,—standing, well nigh alone, against the encroachment of a knavish and covetous world,—and I spoke with feeling.

"Mademoiselle," I said. "If you trust me, I swear by all that is sacred, your trust will not be misplaced!"

CHAPTER XXVIII

To P. Dufour it was a subject of constant concern that my comparative isolation on the Island of Orleans deprived me at times of the advantages of regular attendance at mass, or, as he sometimes more bluntly phrased it, furnished me with an excuse for laxity in this respect. Actuated no less by parochial solicitude than by hospitality, he never neglected an opportunity of urging me to take Sunday dinner with him at Quebec. But during the weeks that followed the departure of M. Simon for France, my attendance at mass and at the good priest's dinner table was as regular as he could desire. To confess a mundane motive, my object was to see him and get the news from week to week.

But of news there was little, and the Summer wore on uneventfully. It may be that nothing would have happened until the return of the ship had not M. de Chatillon grown impatient at the continued coldness he met with from Mlle. de Chatillon, and committed the blunder of passing from entreaties to threats.

It was a clear, fresh September morning. I sat

in a retired corner of the little church and listened somewhat more responsively than usual to the service. When a man has lived for years without family ties, he is prone to fall into indifference with regard to religious observances; but unless he be inherently vicious it is seldom that the faith in which he was cradled entirely loses its hold upon him. He may come to think for himself, and look about him and observe what strange fruit the Spirit seems at times to bring forth, and contrast the humble garments of the fishermen of Galilee with the crimson robe of the haughty prelate who rules a kingdom; he may turn with disgust from the hypocrisy of the Pharisees who still infest every temple; he may recoil from the malice and hatred that envenoms its cruelest darts for those whose dogma differs by one iota from its own; yet now and then there comes a tug at his heart, and he looks back and sees the golden thread that still links him to those far-off days when he lisped his first prayers at his mother's knee, or knelt wide-eyed beside her in the midst of the worshipping congregation, and he sees again in the light of that hallowed memory a glimpse of the river of life.

In some such reminiscent mood, on that sunny Autumn morning, I shared in the worship of the congregation of Quebec. To them, religion was no mere drone of distant voices among pillared aisles and

vaulted arches. It was the very essence of their emprise, the purpose of their sojourn in this stern country; they were a little garrison of the Cross against whose gates the powers of darkness beat in furious rage. There in their midst knelt the black robed missionaries whose duty and whose honour it was to sally forth into the furthest wilderness in quest of souls; there were the red-skinned neophytes, brands plucked from the burning; there was the Governor with his Lieutenant and his train of officers and soldiers. The whole population, with few exceptions, was there; and if, perchance, amidst the motley throng there lurked a few unworthy and unwilling spirits, they too had good reason for their attendance, since temporal and spiritual ran well together, and however irksome enforced presence at mass might be, there were few who would not choose it in preference to being mounted on a wooden horse or chained to a post in the public square.

Among the gentlemen who attended the Governor, M. de Chatillon was foremost in demeanour, in distinction and in dress. Others there were of as good or better family, but for the most part younger sons or men of little wealth, who would scarce have come to New France had they been, like him, the heirs of great estates. Nor did he enjoy their deference merely by reason of his opulence. He was taller, and

handsomer, and more skilled in the accomplishments of war and of peace than any of them.

Knowing what I did of his plans and purposes, I looked on him with aversion. But even had I had no definite reason for animosity I think I should still have disliked him. Despite his superficial cordiality and a certain charm of manner which he possessed, no one could be long acquainted with him without perceiving that he lacked principle; those very graces of demeanour and disposition which most compel our affection for a man who shows himself worthy of respect are most repugnant in one who has lost our confidence, and we are prone to let our suspicion of his motives tinge our view of all his actions, so that qualities which would, in another, be regarded as estimable, seem to us, when displayed by such a one, to be imbued with the colour of falseness.

I studied his face, and was interested to note that he had for the moment lost the air of easy good humour that was habitual with him. I could see in his countenance nothing but sullenness and discontent. If his scheme of coercion was ripening fast, his patience was ebbing faster. He fidgeted restlessly and pulled at his moustachios, and though his eyes wandered now and then in one direction or another, they ever returned to the spot where his cousin, Mlle. de Chatillon, sat among the Ursulines.

Nor were his the only eyes that rested upon her. In the Church were women enough, and some of them handsome,—but none like Mademoiselle. In the rarest galaxy of ladies of the royal court, her loveliness would have made her the central figure; in the homely congregation of Notre Dame de la Recouvrance, it bloomed alone, transcendent. Small blame to the ardent young officers and gentlemen of the garrison that their attention was attracted by her presence. It was not for me to censure them.

The service ended, I waited outside for P. Dufour. Thinking that some slight improvement in my appearance might render less repugnant the plan I had suggested to Mademoiselle, I had provided myself with a decent suit of black, and while I was averse (partly from obstinacy, also for other reasons) to entirely sacrificing my beard, I had had it trimmed by my friend Robert, the barber, and with these furbishings took on the guise of a modest bourgeois. This change was not lost on Mlle. de Chatillon, who came out with the Ursulines while I was waiting, and noted the result of my efforts at improvement with a look of grave approbation. For a moment she appeared to have it in her mind to stop and speak to me, but she finally contented herself with a friendly smile and passed on.

As I still waited, M. de Chatillon emerged, alone,

and still in an unamiable frame of mind. He, too, saw me, and though for long our greeting whenever we met had been of the coldest, some impulse of malice moved him to engage me in conversation.

"I scarce recognized you, my friend," he said. "Have you decided that it is time to take an upward step in the world?"

"You speak in riddles, M. de Chatillon," I replied. "I fail to grasp your meaning."

"If you are setting out to be a gentleman, you must cultivate discernment," he answered. "I was but complimenting you on the unwonted smartness of your attire."

"If the barber and the tailor could make gentlemen of us there would be less need of learning good manners," I said, a trifle shortly.

"That is so," he agreed. "It is to be hoped you will not find your lessons in that subject too painful."

I had no desire to bandy words with him, and turned away to meet P. Dufour, who came out at that moment and greeted me, whereupon M. de Chatillon left us; I looked after him and wondered how long it would be until he and I should come to a violent rupture of our already strained relations.

P. Dufour and I turned our steps toward the mission house. It was an enjoyable walk. To our

right the ground fell away in a steep declivity, affording a widespread view of the wooded slopes of the Beauport shore, that rose in russet and orange and crimson towards the mountains beyond. A cool breeze tempered the heat of the sun. Passing the clearings and threading our way through the woods, we clambered down a steep path to the meadow at the Pointe aux Lièvres, where one of the servants of the mission waited to ferry us across the River St. Charles; and so we found ourselves within the palisade that surrounded the mission.

In this rough building of planks, plastered with mud and thatched with grass, there prevailed an atmosphere of genial friendship and hospitality which did my heart good whenever I visited it. It is true that the Jesuit Fathers as an order do not owe their reputation primarily to the virtues of genial simplicity and benevolence; but in every order, as in every nation, there are men of one type and another, and the Order of Jesus chooses its representatives with a view to their fitness for the work to be done. In New France the enemy was not heresy but heathendom, and the most potent weapon of conversion was not the pitiless persecution of erring fellow Christians which prevails among enlightened peoples, but rather the exercise of the primitive virtues of patience and charity and benevolence, and since they possessed

these virtues in a high degree, and wisdom and wit as well, one could ask no better company at dinner than the Black Robed Fathers at the mission house of Notre Dame des Anges.

When the meal was over, P. Dufour took me to a bench in a comfortable and secluded spot by the river's edge, and we sat down to talk. He had been more thoughtful and silent than usual, and I was curious to know what he had on his mind. I enquired whether he had any news.

He regarded me queerly. "Yes," he replied, "I have heard at least two interesting items of news."

"And what are they?" I asked.

"The first," he said, "is that M. de Chatillon has again been urging Mademoiselle to become his wife."

"From his expression this morning I judge that Mlle. de Chatillon has not consented."

"She has not. In fact, it appears she refused him so positively as to stir him to anger."

"That is not difficult," I said. "What of it?"

"M. de Chatillon went so far as to tell Mademoiselle that she will shortly be under the necessity of becoming his wife whether she is willing or not, and suggested that it would be wise to display more alacrity in accepting the inevitable."

"That was an indiscretion on his part," I said.

"It was worse than an indiscretion," said the Jesuit.

"No doubt he thinks it safe to speak out now, since we are to hear from France so soon."

P. Dufour nodded, and fell into silence.

"And the other item?" I enquired.

"It was news to me," he said, "though not to you. Mlle. de Chatillon told me of your suggestion that she should be married to you."

"I preferred that you should hear of it from her. What do you think of it?"

"Were such a proposal advanced by any other than you I should oppose it to the utmost."

"But since it is I who advance it?"

"Since it is you who advance it, I do not know what to say. But in the first place, my son, what is your motive?"

"I desire to be of assistance in extricating Mademoiselle from her difficulties."

"But, look you,—this is a serious matter,—it is not as if you offered to pick up her glove or tie her shoe-latchet!"

"I grant that to Mlle. de Chatillon it is a serious question. She is young, wealthy, beautiful, and may sooner or later be attracted to some gentleman whose qualities and possessions make him suitable to be her husband. In such case it might be most embarrassing were there any hitch in disposing of her existing spouse. From my point of view, however, there is

no likelihood of my wishing to marry elsewhere, since, in the first place, I have no thought of marriage, and in the second place, did I desire a wife, I could hope to find no wife more desirable or attractive than Mademoiselle herself."

"In sooth," said the Jesuit, drily, "it would be a doubtful business for any woman to be married to a man who speaks of the topic as tranquilly as you speak of it."

"That is why I have not urged it upon her. I assumed that should she think of it at all, she would consult you and thus obtain the wisest possible advice."

"Jesting aside," said P. Dufour, "my regard and esteem for both of you are such that were a normal marriage proposed,—a marriage of the heart,—I should welcome it as the happiest of events, and take little thought of the superficial disparities which would invite the criticism of the world at large. But to degrade one of the holiest sacraments of the Church to the level of a mere convenience,—that offends my conscience, my son."

"It is often done," I replied.

"That is no excuse."

"Also," I said, "if Mademoiselle is driven into an unwilling marriage with M. de Chatillon,—will your conscience enjoy greater ease?"

He made no answer, but sat in troubled contemplation of the problem, while I puffed at my pipe and watched the minnows in the little river that flowed beside us.

"What does Mlle. de Chatillon think of it?" I asked.

"Like yourself, she is in some respects inscrutable," said P. Dufour. "She is unquestionably determined to resist the interference of her relatives. Needless to say, she looks upon you as a trusted friend, and of such she has but few, either here or elsewhere, and none who can serve her in the way in which you have offered to serve her, or suggest a less drastic course."

"I appreciate her difficulty in deciding, and yours in advising."

"It may interest you to know that one consideration which embarrasses her greatly is the thought of the sacrifice she would impose upon you were she to accept your offer."

"That is a strange idea," I said.

"Valuing her own freedom as she does," explained P. Dufour, "she is unable to understand how you can be willing so readily to surrender yours."

"As for that," I said, "you may reassure her upon that score. But she must make up her mind quickly. The ship will soon arrive, and then her new guardian will be in control.

The old priest heaved a doleful sigh of perplexity, whereat I rose to my feet and laughed.

"There is your Rubicon." I said, pointing to the gleaming waters of the Basin. "When you and Mademoiselle are ready to cross it, you will find me at my home on the Island. If you will bring the lady, I can supply the ring."

"My son! My son!" he said, sadly, and shook his head.

CHAPTER XXIX

To say that on leaving P. Dutour I put the subject of our discussion out of my mind and thought no more of it during the days that followed, would be to lay claim to a measure of indifference which I did not enjoy; it would be a dull and apathetic man who, knowing there was a chance of his being married within the week, did not have sufficient interest in the affair to stop and speculate upon it from time to time. I confess it was continually in my thoughts, the more so since I had an intuition that my proposal would be accepted. On Wednesday André returned from a trip to the town with the news that he had met P. Dufour and that the priest had told him to let me know he would come with Mlle. de Chatillon to visit me on the following morning.

It is one thing to ponder such an event as a possibility, or even as a probability, and another to face it as an immediate and inevitable certainty, and I found myself a trifle flurried. Looking about me, I was seized with distaste for the unkempt appearance of the surroundings, and relieved my excitement by

putting all hands to work at a feverish cleaning and sweeping and garnishing of the house, and trimming of the garden and lawn, so that I dare say the place never had so thorough a going over.

During the night it rained, and the morning was cool and fresh and fragrant, yet resplendent with dazzling sunshine; the day was still young when I discerned the approaching sail of my visitors. I met them at the landing-stage, and led them to a shady seat in the garden, where we sat down together, quite as if they had come on the most ordinary of social visits. Yet it was an embarrassing ordeal for all of us. P. Dufour was more grave and absent-minded than I had ever seen him; and if I had thought Mademoiselle could not be more beautiful than she had seemed, it was because I had never before seen such colour in her cheeks or such dignity in the brave composure of her perfect features and the queenly poise of her incomparable head. For her sake I was glad when the Jesuit proceeded at once to the purpose of their visit.

"Are you still of the same mind, M. Regnier, as when we were talking together the other day?" he asked.

"I am still of the same mind."

"In considering the various courses open to her, Mademoiselle inclines to the opinion that the course

suggested by you is that which will best enable her to carry out the plans which led her to come to this country."

"I agree with her."

"For my own part," he continued, "I have no little hesitation in officiating at so unusual a ceremony. Yet I cannot but reflect that I know both of you to be competent to decide your own affairs, and free to enter into wedlock, and if, without taking me into your confidence, you had presented yourselves before me, I should gladly have complied with your wishes. It does not seem fitting that your frankness should debar me from doing so. I make no secret of this, that I shall hope and pray that this marriage which you are entering into as a means rather than an end may in the providence of God ripen into that fuller and richer union which it would be my greatest happiness to behold."

He paused, but on this delicate subject no suitable comment occurred to me, nor, apparently, to Mademoiselle, and we awaited his further remarks in silence. Presently he turned to me.

"I have said, M. Regnier, that I know you to be unmarried. Yet I have never questioned you about your life before you came to this country, and it is my duty to ask you directly. Are you unmarried?"

"I am."

"And you, Mademoiselle,—have you finally decided to marry M. Regnier?"

"Since he is willing,—yes."

"Then let us proceed with the ceremony."

I rose and led them into the house. Though there was little that could be done to relieve its bareness, it was clean and bright, and garnished with great bowls of flowers and branches of flaming Autumn leaves which I had been moved to gather that morning in honour of the occasion. To every woman the celebration of her marriage is the most memorable of events, to which she looks forward and backward throughout her life; realizing how different must be these surroundings from any in which her imagination could ever have framed the scene of her wedding, I had sought to make them as little distressing as possible. She caught her breath as she looked about her, but said nothing. We took our place before P. Dufour (dispensing with the presence of a witness), and a few short minutes later I placed the ring on her finger, and he pronounced us man and wife.

We regarded one another in sober silence for a space. She twisted the ring absently, and presently noticing it, asked me where I obtained it.

"It was my mother's wedding ring, Madame."

She looked up quickly at the unfamiliar form of address.

"And now it is in my keeping," she said musingly, "and I, Monsieur, am in your keeping."

"So long as you are willing that it shall be so, Madame."

She laughed. "It amuses me," she said, "the solemn way you say 'Madame.' "

I shrugged my shoulders.

"Now that we have leaped," she said, "let us sit down and look for a time."

I brought them cake and wine, and we seated ourselves at our singular wedding feast.

"It devolves upon you, Monsieur, to say what we are to do next," said she. "You cannot complain that I have not followed your advice thus far," she added demurely.

"For the present," I replied, "it would probably be better to say nothing of the step you have taken."

"How can I keep it secret," she asked, "if you call me 'Madame' and I have to wear this ring?"

"Then I shall call you 'Mademoiselle,' " I said, "and as for the ring, I ask only that you try not to lose it."

"What do you think, P. Dufour?" she enquired.

"What is your reason for suggesting secrecy, M. Regnier?" he asked.

"I have in mind the idea of making it easier for Madame,—for Mademoiselle,—to arrange for the

marriage to be annulled when it becomes desirable for her to procure a dispensation to that end. If it can be shown that the ceremony was secret and clandestine from the very first, it will be a simpler matter to make out a case that will appeal to the ecclesiastical authorities as valid."

"My faith!" he exclaimed. "Let me hear no more of that unholy plan of yours! Is not the lady you have married fair enough, good enough, well born enough, to be your permanent wife?"

"I hope Monsieur Regnier," said Mademoiselle, "that you will not accuse me in your mind of having inspired Père Dufour's earnest plea on my behalf."

"I accuse him rather of inciting me to take an unworthy advantage of the confidence you have reposed in me."

"That," she replied, "is something I know you would never do."

"It has not been my custom," I said.

We fell into thoughtful silence, which was at last broken by Mademoiselle.

"I think you are right," she remarked, "for the present we had better not make this step known, until we see in what manner my uncle and cousin set about putting into effect their plans for my future."

"They will no doubt be annoyed when they find their scheme has miscarried," I said.

"They will be furious," she replied, with a mischievous smile, which suddenly gave place to an expression of anxiety, "but you must on no account allow M. de Chatillon to draw you into a quarrel! He is a most noted swordsman."

"A noted swordsman," I repeated. "Where did he get that reputation?"

"He was said to be the most skillful swordsman in all Auvergne since the time of M. de la Roux. M. Regnier, do, I beg of you, be careful."

"Do not be alarmed," I said, "should he seek to thrust a meeting upon me, we can each fight with his favourite weapon,—he with his sword and I with my musket,—at a distance of a dozen paces, as befits the difference in our rank."

"It is no laughing matter," she persisted earnestly, "I wonder that I was so thoughtless as to overlook the fact that his wrath would be turned against you. I had no right to draw you into my quarrel, in which you had no part."

"If I had no part in your quarrel before to-day I have now; your enemies are my enemies and your quarrels are my quarrels, to be maintained as such."

She looked at me strangely. "You speak as I should have expected you to speak," she said, " yet I ought to have thought of it before."

"I am glad you did not," I replied.

As I spoke there came a knock at the door, and at my bidding André entered, to tell me I was wanted. I went out, and found my friend Abraham, the pilot of the St. Lawrence River, had come to see me.

"André told me you have visitors," he said, "and my only excuse for interrupting you is that I am in a hurry. The Indians have sighted the ship and I am going to meet her, and the Governor ordered me to land here on my way and inform you that he wishes to see you without delay."

The call was an unwelcome one, but I could not well refuse it, and when Abraham had departed I returned indoors and told them of it; since I have ever held that obedience, to be a virtue, must be linked with promptness, we set out for Quebec at once.

CHAPTER XXX

The errand on which the Governor planned to send me was an urgent one; he had heard that very morning from a fugitive that a large band of Iroquois was preparing a surprise attack on our settlement at Three Rivers, and it was necessary to warn them. Deeming it unsafe to depend on the wind, André and I took to a canoe and paddled incessantly against the current for thirty hours, barely stopping to eat; we arrived at Three Rivers weary beyond words, but in time to save the settlement from surprise, so that on the next day, when the river suddenly became alive with screeching redskins, they found our palisades lined with muskets and everyone safely inside.

Had the advent of the Iroquois been delayed a day longer, I should have been tempted to return to Quebec, for the place was well enough manned against open assault, and I was anxious to be on hand to view the developments following the arrival of the ship; but as it was, the savages, disappointed of the success they had hoped for, settled down to something like a siege, and it was more than a fortnight before the

inherent instability of their character at last asserted itself, and led them to disappear up the river again as suddenly as they had come.

When our scouts returned with the news that they were gone, we lost no time in setting out on the return journey. We were but a few hours on the way when we again met Abraham, who was this time in charge of a strong party going up to Montreal, and I heard from him news of a disquieting nature.

When we met he looked at me with a quizzical expression, and asked me why I was so earnestly hastening homeward. "I may be wrong, M. Regnier," he said, "but I am inclined to think you might better turn round and come with us."

"Why?" I enquired.

"Everyone in Quebec is astonished to learn that you are a married man after all."

"What business is it of theirs?" I asked.

"As you suggest, it is none of their business. But I see you do not deny it."

"Why should I deny it?"

"No reason, I suppose. But in all these years I have never before heard you make mention of your wife."

"How could I have made mention of her?"

"She has at last come to New France in search of you."

"Come to New France?"

"Yes, M. Regnier, she arrived on the ship I brought in the day after you left. Were I you, I think I should turn around, for from what I hear she regards herself as much wronged by what she terms your desertion of her."

I gaped at him. Here was a queer turn of events!

"From what you hear?" I repeated. "Is there much talk about it?"

He laughed. "That sort of news about a man travels fast. Moreover, there seem to be one or two people interested in spreading it. M. de Chatillon for example,—he seems for some reason to have taken a dislike to you."

"When he had first spoken of "my wife" I had jumped to the conclusion that Mademoiselle had been driven into making public the fact that we had gone through the marriage ceremony, but such was evidently not the case; in face of this latest development I doubted if she would be in any great hurry to do so.

"What manner of woman is this who claims to be my wife?" I asked.

"But surely you should know!" he exclaimed. "Perhaps it is that you wish to learn what she looks like after all these years?"

"Have it that way if it pleases you."

"I saw her but once, and that before I had heard

the story, so that I had little interest in her. She is staying with the Ursulines, and I am told she has taken ill since her arrival, and has not been out. She is verging on middle age, and looks,—you will pardon my saying it,—like a woman who has had more than her share of trouble, and has been somewhat affected by it,—here." He tapped his forehead.

"She must have been," I said, "if she comes to claim me as her husband."

"Then you do deny that you have a wife?"

"I know no more about her than you do," I said, "but when I see her I shall assuredly tell her she is mistaken."

"Then you are resolved to go on to Quebec and confront her?"

"Yes. Also to have a word with some of the people who are taking so great an interest in my affairs."

"I should not be too eager to pick a quarrel with M. de Chatillon, at any rate," he remarked significantly, "he is said to be more than handy with his sword."

"I have heard that before," I replied, and as he was already some distance behind his party, we took leave of one another.

CHAPTER XXXI

My first duty on my return was to report to the Governor the outcome of the errand on which he had sent me, and I therefore turned my steps up the steep ascent of the rock to the fort. On the way I met many who knew me by sight, and some with whom I was acquainted; though no one mentioned it to me, I could perceive by the way they looked at me that gossip in respect to my domestic affairs had reached every ear. When I sent in my name to the Governor I was admitted without delay, and found him seated at his table. He was a conscientious man, with a strong sense of duty, who esteemed his office as a trust and not as a means of profit, and the precarious condition of the colony kept him both busy and anxious. When I entered he asked me how my mission had fared. He listened to my account with the closest interest, and when he heard how soon after his warning the Indians had appeared, he expressed warm commendation of our labours to arrive in time. But though his words were cordial there was in his manner of speaking a tinge of constraint, and when I

saluted and turned to leave his presence, he held me with a gesture.

"M. Regnier," he said, "there is another affair about which I desire to speak to you."

"Yes, your Excellency?"

He paused, as though at a loss how to begin. "In your absence," he said, "a matter in which you are concerned has come to my attention,"—he paused again.

"Yes, your Excellency?"

"To come to the point at once,—M. Regnier, is it true that you are a married man?"

It was an awkward question, and I hesitated, being at a loss for a truthful reply.

He scrutinized me keenly. "Why do you not answer?" he asked. "You can scarcely say you do not know. All these years I have understood you to be a bachelor. I have believed you to be a truthful man, and for that reason I have begun by asking you directly. Answer me, Sir,—have you a wife?"

"A wife, your Excellency?"

"Yes, Sir, a wife. My faith, I begin to think it is true!" he exclaimed.

"But pardon, your Excellency. Why do you ask me that question?"

"Because I desire to know."

"But who says I have a wife, your Excellency?"

"It is not for you to question me, Sir! I have asked you a simple question,—the simplest of all questions,—and instead of answering me you hum and haw and try to find out how much I know!"

In fact it was not so simple a question as he thought. I racked my brain for a method of directing it into simpler and more answerable form.

"I do not desire to ascertain how much your Excellency knows," I said (perhaps too slowly) "but if I seem to hesitate it is because of the implication in your Excellency's question. Am I to understand that you wish to find out whether I have had a wife for years while pretending to be unmarried?"

"That is what I wish to find out."

"Then I can assure your Excellency that such is not the case."

He eyed me dubiously. "But why are you so tardy about denying it?" he demanded.

"Your Excellency will note that I am none the less positive in my denial."

"After you have had time to think the situation over and decide what to say," he replied, with meaning.

To such a remark from one in his position there was no answer. Moreover, I knew that he spoke judicially and without personal animus, and I might have said the same thing in his place. I was angry, to be

sure, but not so much at him as at the unexpected turn of affairs that had brought to pass this absurd complication, the unpleasant effects of which were becoming more and more clear to me as the interview proceeded.

"I am sorry you have given me reason to doubt your word," continued the Governor, thoughtfully, "because in this matter it is largely a question of your word against that of another."

"What other, your Excellency?"

"The woman who claims to be your wife."

"I have answered your question, your Excellency. Is it too much that I should now beg you to furnish me with the particulars of the matter to which you refer?"

"It may be told in a few words. This woman arrived from France the day you went up the river, and commenced making enquiries for you. Finding you had left hurriedly, she suspected you of an attempt to evade her. Someone seems to have told her that you had gone by my orders and she came to me."

"What is her name, your Excellency?"

"The name she gave me was Regnier,—Madame Regnier," he replied drily.

"It is not an unusual name, your Excellency. I make no claim to a monopoly of it."

"She states that you married her many years ago,

—before leaving France,—and that you deserted her shortly afterwards."

"She is utterly mistaken. I married no woman, —was entangled with no woman,—before leaving France. What I cannot understand is how she has formed the idea after all these years that it is I who am her husband. I should have thought there was no one in France who still remembered me or was aware of my existence."

"One cannot always count on remaining out of mind by keeping out of sight," said the Governor, even more drily than before. "She comes from Auvergne, which is, I believe, your native province."

"Yes, your Excellency."

"It appears from what she says,—but on this point she is not quite clear,—that she had no idea of your whereabouts until, quite recently, enquiries were set on foot in regard to your past, in the course of which she was interrogated and learned from her questioner that you were known to be alive and in this country. She seems to have obtained rather full particulars."

This was news to me. I found myself wondering who had mustered sufficient interest in the history of Pierre Regnier to wish to investigate it at this late date. But at the moment I put the problem aside for future consideration.

"Assuredly, your Excellency, I must see this

woman," I said. "I do not anticipate difficulty in satisfying her that I am not the man she seeks."

"I trust you may be successful in doing so, M. Regnier," he replied gravely. "But for the present you cannot see her. Since her arrival she has been taken down with a fever, and at present she lies in a very sad and dangerous condition in the Hotel Dieu. I gather from what you say that your meeting with her would be, at best, a grave disappointment, and might lead to excitement and mental strain that would be fatal to her."

"If you will give instructions that word is to be sent me when she is in a condition to see me, I shall esteem it a favour, your Excellency."

"I promise you I shall not fail to do so," he answered, a trifle shortly, whereupon I saluted and left him.

CHAPTER XXXII

To a man who has that regard for the truth which an honest man should have, it is a source of no slight irritation that his word should be doubted, and I emerged from the fort in a morose frame of mind. Loitering along in a state of indetermination as to what I should do next, my thoughts continually reverting to the Governor's remarks, annoyed by the covert glances of those who passed me, I presently met M. de Chatillon.

Our mutual dislike had reached the point at which we had ceased to salute one another, and I advanced to meet him with my eyes turned away, but on this occasion, when I had less desire for his conversation than ever, his spite impelled him to taunt me.

"So, M. Regnier!" he said, "I hear that Madame Regnier has come to seek you. No doubt you will be glad to see her after all these years!"

"No doubt," I replied, "I have not seen her yet."

"If you ask my opinion," he continued, "I do not think you have treated her very well."

"I do not ask your opinion, and am not interested in what you think."

"You may not be interested in what I think, M. Regnier, but were I to tell you what I know,—then you might be interested."

"What do you know?" I asked.

"All in good time," he said. "You shall learn one of these days that I know more about you than you like."

"So it is you that have been making enquiries about me," I said. "You might have been better employed."

"At any rate, I have learned one or two facts," he replied.

"You may yet learn more about me that you will like less," I said.

"I am inclined to believe you have about reached the end of your tether," he said.

"You are spending altogether too much of your time and thought in consideration of my affairs," I replied.

"That is for me to decide," he said.

"Look you, M. de Chatillon," I said, "I am told you have been spreading gossip and scandal about me. I would advise you to refrain from discussing my affairs from now on."

"Indeed! And why should I?"

"In the first place, because such gossiping is unseemly in one who claims to be a gentleman. And

since that reason may have little weight with you, I will give you another,—to wit, that it is offensive to me."

"Your second reason has less weight with me than the first."

"Nevertheless, you may take it for what it is worth, as a warning."

"Do you dare to threaten me?" he cried, in sudden anger.

"It would seem so," I said.

"Then let me tell you, you would do better to beg me to spare you, ere I have you carried to the gallows you were born to be hanged on!"

"I should sooner be hanged than beg mercy from you," I said.

"You talk boldly," he replied. "Perhaps you will sing a different tune when the time comes."

As he spoke we were joined by three of the young gentlemen of the town who were passing, and paused to hail M. de Chatillon, who was evidently popular with them.

"What is this?" said young Savigny, "you two seem to be having an argument."

" 'Tis nothing," replied M. de Chatillon, "I was but congratulating M. Regnier on the arrival of his wife in New France. It is quite a romantic story."

"Tell us the story," they exclaimed.

"Have I your permission, M. Regnier?" he enquired mockingly.

"You have not."

"Ah, well,—I must do without it. You doubtless know, gentlemen, that M. Regnier has lived in this country for many years. He travelled hither and thither for a time, and finally settled down as a farmer on the Island of Orleans. Everyone has regarded him as a bachelor, and his conduct towards women has been exemplary. And now it transpires that he has been married all this time. It appears that he left his wife behind and came away without leaving information in regard to his destination. His wife, inspired no doubt by the memory of his many good qualities, has been untiring in her search for him, and when at last she learned that he was here, she followed him, and arrived a fortnight ago, when M. Regnier was temporarily absent. He has but now returned, and though he is desolated to learn that the lady is ill, his joy in anticipation of seeing her later is helping him to put up with the anxiety and the delay. Is not that a romantic story, gentlemen?"

His auditors looked from him to me, and from me to him, in evident perplexity at this public and flippant airing of a condition of affairs that must obviously be such as to cause me serious embarrassment. I concluded that M. de Chatillon was not

averse to a quarrel, and being myself in a sombre frame of mind, decided to gratify his inclination.

"M. de Chatillon has told you a story that no doubt interests you all," I said. "I might explain that I was informing him that his habit of gossiping about my affairs is offensive to me."

"To be sure!" agreed M. de Chatillon, "You did mention something of the sort."

"Then I might add, M. de Chatillon, that your story is a tissue of lies from beginning to end, and is therefore, doubly offensive." Saying which, I struck him smartly in the face.

Whether he was surprised by this manœuvre, it is hard to say; without question he had every reason to expect it. But it instantly dispelled his air of nonchalance, and with the most violent of oaths he whipped out his sword and would have spitted me then and there, had he not found himself looking into the muzzle of one of my pistols.

He was not so blinded with rage that he did not realize I had the advantage of him, and he paused to consider the matter further.

"If you wore a sword," he said, "you might not be so free in your behaviour. As it is, be assured I shall find means to make you smart for it, and that soon."

"I appreciate your forbearance," I replied, "but

if you can induce one of your friends here to lend me his sword, you will not have to wait so long for your satisfaction."

"That is a good idea, M. Regnier," he responded, with an evil smile. "One of the best of your ideas,—and probably one of the last. Savigny, I beg of you, lend him your sword, and let him for once in his life know what it is like to be a gentleman."

"But this is mere murder," objected M. Savigny. "He has no experience with such weapons."

"Do not refuse on my account, M. Savigny," I said, "I am aware of his reputation, but I am not entirely without skill myself."

Reluctantly, he handed me his sword, and I put my pistol back in my belt. We adjourned without further discussion to a quiet spot nearby, sheltered from observation and carpeted with grass, and M. de Chatillon and I turned to face one another.

CHAPTER XXXIII

I EXAMINED M. Savigny's sword with care, reflecting as I did so that I had, on the whole, been rather reckless in offering to trust my life to an untried weapon. Fortunately, it seemed to be a reliable blade, well balanced and of good temper. Looking up from my inspection I saw the eyes of M. de Chatillon fixed upon me with a mixture of curiosity, malevolence and impatience.

"Does it suit you, M. Regnier?" he enquired, with a resumption of his former air of mocking politeness.

"It might be worse," I replied.

"Then if you are quite ready, we might proceed. Or would you like to leave any messages or instructions?"

"No, I thank you. I am ready."

M. de Chatillon did not lack confidence, and fenced very well. He seemed inclined to play with me for a while, and I welcomed this disposition on his part, since it gave me time to become used to the long unfamiliar feeling of a sword hilt in my hand. He had

some slight advantage of youth, and a certain alertness born of constant practice which I lacked; but my wrist was stronger than his, and my endurance greater. I fought on the defensive with little show of skill, watching his eyes and reserving my more serious efforts until such time as he seemed to mean business. One can learn a great deal from the eyes of his adversary in a fight, and the value of such knowledge is that it comes before the event. That he intended to kill me there was no doubt, and for that matter, I had much the same uncharitable intention in regard to him. But so long as he thought he had me at his mercy he seemed to be disposed to play with me as a cat plays with a mouse. He made feint after feint, which I disregarded, interspersed now and then with a lunge from which I sprang back.

"Murderer!" he said. "It is cunning of you to use me as a means of cheating the gallows."

"If you have knowledge which seems to incriminate me," I replied, "it is to be hoped you have made a note of it for the information of your executors."

"Be assured, I shall kill you in a minute or so," he retorted.

"Had you thought otherwise, I doubt if you would have been so eager to fight me," I said.

This unpleasant remark put an end to the respite I was enjoying, and he came at me like a veritable tiger.

But I was prepared for him by now, and we proceeded to provide a pretty entertainment for the spectators. Though I had no time to look about me, I heard muttered exclamations as I parried his rapid, vicious thrusts one after the other, and I had an idea that their sympathies were with me rather than with M. de Chatillon. Illogical though it may seem, this sympathy was of no little assistance to me, even though it came from a group of strangers, and my mind gradually cleared itself of the momentary confusion caused by the violence of his attack; finally, as his furious efforts wore him down, I began to feel myself master of the situation.

But the conflict was not fated to have the end I desired, for even as I planned to take the offensive, who should rush upon the scene but P. Dufour, calling upon us in a peremptory tone to desist.

I doubt if I should have heeded anyone else, and perhaps not him, but glancing in his direction I saw that Mlle. de Chatillon was behind him, and I had not the effrontery to kill her cousin before her eyes. Reluctantly I stepped back, but M. de Chatillon had no such scruples, or it may be that he did not perceive anything but my retreat; at any rate he rushed forward to engage me again. But he was too far spent to be dangerous, and I jerked his sword out of his hand with ease, and presented my point at his breast,

so that he was forced to spring back to avoid being run through. Thereupon I put my foot upon his fallen weapon, and turned to the priest.

"M. Regnier!" he cried, "what is the meaning of this disgraceful behaviour?"

"Why disgraceful?" I asked.

"Can there be anything more disgraceful than two Christian men striving to kill one another?"

"It is not unusual among Christians," I replied.

"This must go no further!" he declared.

"It can go no further," I said, "unless I spit this gentleman and so teach others to behave themselves more carefully."

"Why, that would be murder!" gasped P. Dufour.

"He called me a murderer five minutes ago. Did you not, M. de Chatillon?"

He glared at me in a rage of hatred intensified by his helplessness. "I did," he replied, "and you shall see ere long what I meant by it."

"That will no doubt be interesting," I replied. "Here, take your sword." I kicked it towards him, and he slowly stooped, picked it up and sheathed it with a click.

"I bid you good-day Sir," he said, "you shall hear from me again."

I made no reply, and he walked moodily away.

I turned to young M. Savigny and handed him his

sword with a word of thanks. He regarded me with a puzzled expression.

"You spoke truly when you said you were not without experience of swordsmanship," he said. "I wish I could handle my sword as you did just now."

"To what end? You might be led to pick a quarrel with someone more skillful than yourself. In this country marksmanship is more important than swordsmanship."

He laughed,—a frank boyish laugh. "I should be sorry to have to meet you in either," he declared, and with a polite salute he and his companions departed, leaving me alone with P. Dufour and Mademoiselle.

CHAPTER XXXIV

To be brow-beaten as a liar by the Governor,—to be regarded askance by all whom I met,—to be insulted and threatened by M. de Chatillon,—finally, to be baulked of my hard earned victory by P. Dufour,—all this was little conducive to good humour, and I turned on him sharply.

"Why did you interfere?" I demanded.

"My son!" he exclaimed. "How can you ask? It was my bounden duty!"

"A plague on your duty! I would have given him his deserts in another minute!"

"His deserts?" repeated the Jesuit blankly, "and what has M. de Chatillon done that he should deserve to be killed?"

"For one thing, he has insulted me openly, and spread malicious gossip about me behind my back."

"But even so——" expostulated the Jesuit.

"And for another, he has sought to force Mademoiselle into an unwelcome marriage,—do I not owe him something for that?"

"At least," interrupted Mlle. de Chatillon, "he has not tried to trick me into a bigamous marriage."

I stared at her in perplexity as the implication of her words and the tone in which she uttered them gradually became clear to me, and added fuel to the fire that already burned within me.

Without doubt I was unreasonable. Had I swallowed my wrath and taken them both into my confidence then and there, it might have saved not a little trouble. But that I should be doubted by my closest friends stung me, and that she,—of all the world,—for whom I would spend and be spent without stint, —that she should accuse me, without waiting to hear my defence, of being an utter rogue, was beyond endurance.

"So you think I have deceived you?" I said.

"What else am I to think?" she replied.

"That is unfortunate. Such a belief on your part will naturally make it awkward to proceed with our plan for defeating your uncle's attempt at establishing himself in the position of your guardian."

"Our plan!" she repeated scornfully. "I wish with all my heart I had never heard of it!"

"On the other hand, the fact of a prior marriage on my part would have proved a very useful point in setting you free."

"Why argue? I trusted you implicitly, and I find I was mistaken in you," she replied, in a colourless voice.

"Your trust, however implicit, was evidently not very firm, since it has disappeared at the first breath of suspicion."

"I would that I had never met you!" she declared passionately.

"After all," I said, "there is little to justify your present attitude. I offered to help you by what seemed much in the nature of a business arrangement. I offer no opposition to your taking the necessary steps to be rid of me now."

"To do that I must make known the fact that I have gone through a marriage ceremony with you. I should die of shame!"

"But Mademoiselle," interrupted P. Dufour, "if M. Regnier admits that he has a wife already, your marriage to him was no marriage, and needs no annulment."

"That is true," I replied, "but I make no such admission."

"Then how can you say you offer no opposition?"

"I repeat it. But I have still some self-respect, though I seem to have lost the respect of those whom I considered my friends."

"Not so fast, M. Regnier," said P. Dufour, "I have known you too long and too well to be without respect for your many good qualities. A man who has put the sins and follies of his youth behind him,

and lived as you have lived for many years a sober and industrious life, does not forfeit the respect of his friends because he is confronted once more with a surviving witness of the past from which he has striven to separate himself. For my part, I am inclined to acquit you of any uncharitable design against the happiness of Mademoiselle. It may be that you deceived us as to your prior marriage with the mistaken idea that your motives justified your action. That your former wife should immediately appear only serves to show how mistaken was such an idea, for Mademoiselle now finds herself in a more awkward position than ever. I can well appreciate that there may be many reasons why you should hesitate to acknowledge this other woman as your wife, and from one or two conversations I had with her before she fell ill, it is clear to me that she bears you no good will; but would it not be better, my son, to relieve the uncertainty in which Mademoiselle now finds herself, by acquainting us, at least, with the full facts of the case? Do you not think that in fairness you owe us that much?"

"Though I might complain at your readiness in concluding that I am a sinner, it is some comfort that you regard me with charity as a repentant sinner. But I married no woman in France, and Madame here is at the present moment my wife in the eyes

of the Church and the law. In that statement I give you the essential, if not the full facts of the case."

"It would be easier to believe you," said Mademoiselle, "if you were to tell us all the facts."

"It is a complicated story," I said.

"I can well believe that, at least," she replied coldly.

Angry as I was, I could not but admire her very haughtiness; but if she was stubborn, so was I.

"If you find it so hard to believe my simple assertion," I said. "It would be idle for me to go into further explanations. When you are prepared to give me credit for ordinary truthfulness, it will be in order for you to send for me. In the meantime, I would earnestly counsel you, in any steps you see fit to take, to act on the assumption that what I have just told you is correct."

With a bow (which was no doubt stiff enough) I left them.

CHAPTER XXXV

It is one of the meaner traits of human nature that leads us, when we are slighted or annoyed by one person, to seek to relieve our pent up anger at the expense of others who are wholly innocent of offence. Such a habit I have ever striven to avoid, but during the days that followed my clash with M. de Chatillon, and my quarrel with Mademoiselle, I fear my men found me a surly and exacting master; I worked early and late with sullen fierceness, and saw to it that they kept well up with me. If it helped me but little, it was good for the farm, and the work of the season was well advanced when M. Daniel arrived with an order from the Governor for my arrest.

He came with two soldiers as I was washing my hands for dinner. When I saw him I guessed his errand, and reflected that my affairs had taken one more turn in the wrong direction. However, he was an honest fellow, and I greeted him with such cordiality as I could muster.

"Good-day, M. Daniel," I said. "What brings you in this official guise?"

"A most unwelcome mission, my friend," he replied gravely. "I am sent to arrest you and take you to the Governor."

"If the mission is unwelcome, I can at least promise you that it will be safe and easy. But what is the charge on which I am to be arrested?"

"That I cannot tell you," he replied. "I have not the usual form of warrant, but merely a short note from his Excellency the Governor."

I invited M. Daniel to take dinner with me, which, after some urging, he consented to do, being influenced no doubt by his friendship for me as well as by the savoury smell of the roasted fowl that was in readiness for us. I questioned him further on the reason for my arrest until I was satisfied that he really knew no more of it than I did. Whereupon I asked him for the gossip of the town.

He regarded me with a droll expression. "In truth, M. Regnier," he replied, "I should say that the gossip of the town centers about you and your affairs. "

"About me?"

"Your fight with M. de Chatillon is common knowledge, and your fame as a swordsman is on every lip; your domestic affairs are also the subject of no little conversation."

"And when the fact of my arrest becomes known

they will have something more to chatter about," I said.

He shook his head sympathetically. "Your friends will be distressed to hear of it," he remarked.

"My friends!" I repeated. "I have few enough of them."

"There are more of them than you think," he replied. "On many sides I have heard from those who take your part. The Governor himself seemed not a little upset when he sent me here."

"No doubt he is bound by his duty," I said. "I should have done better to kill that gentleman who has poisoned his mind against me."

"You mean M. de Chatillon?"

"Yes. He threatened me with something of this sort when we parted."

"Beyond question, he is in a frame of mind to do you as much harm as he can. But tell me, M. Regnier, what is it that has brought affairs to such a pass between two men whose walks in life are so widely separated as yours and his?"

"That would be a long story, M. Daniel," I said.

"I am curious to hear it," he said.

"No doubt you will hear it some day. But there are still chapters to come, and in the meantime I am as curious as you; so if you are ready, M. Daniel, let us go to his Excellency the Governor, that I may find

out why he despatches you with this show of force, instead of following his one time custom of sending me word to come to him."

To my men, who were not a little agitated at seeing me taken off to prison, I gave such instructions in regard to carrying on their work as I could think of at the moment, and left the rest to their good sense, of which I had already received ample evidence; thereupon setting out for Quebec, we reached the fort without incident of note, and M. Daniel dismissed the soldiers, and ushered me into the Governor's anteroom, where we waited until such time as he should be ready to see me.

Presently he sent word to M. Daniel to bring me in; before doing so, M. Daniel, with a whispered apology, removed my weapons and laid them to one side. Though he had showed unusual consideration in letting me retain them up to this point, the precaution annoyed me more than anything else in the whole proceeding, and I have no doubt my thoughts were reflected in my expression as I entered the Governor's presence.

It was plain that he also found the situation unpleasant. His demeanour was that of a man driven by a sense of duty to follow a course uncongenial to him, but he covered his embarrassment by an assumption of sternness. He signed to M. Daniel to with-

draw, and I was left standing alone before him, and wondering what it was all about.

"M. Regnier," he said, "I grieve that it has been necessary for me to put you under arrest."

"Why necessary, your Excellency? I have always come when you sent for me."

"It is my duty. You are accused of a most serious crime."

"What crime, if it please your Excellency?"

"You are accused of murder."

"By M. de Chatillon, your Excellency?"

"By M. de Chatillon."

"Whose life I spared a week ago when I held it between my thumb and finger."

"You do ill to speak to me of that matter. If I did my duty I should punish you for it."

"I did but accept the challenge of M. de Chatillon, who is still at large. But does M. de Chatillon go to the length of saying whom I have murdered?"

"He accuses you of the murder of the Vicomte de la Roux."

Had I been accused of the murder of Henri Quatre I could not have been more astounded. I stared at him, and, although I do not remember it, I have no doubt my mouth was open.

"Well, Sir?" he said, after a time. "Well, Sir? What have you to say about it?"

"I give you my word, your Excellency,—until you told me this, I had not the least idea that M. de la Roux was dead; as for killing him,—that would be the last thing in this world that I should do!"

"Then you know nothing of the manner of his death?"

"Absolutely nothing, your Excellency."

"Unfortunately, M. Regnier, there is evidence against you."

"What evidence, your Excellency? The statements and surmises of a man who hates me?"

"More than that," replied the Governor. "When he and Mlle. de Chatillon enquired of you in regard to M. de la Roux, did you not say that since leaving Auvergne you had neither met him nor heard his name?"

"To the best of my knowledge, that is what I said, your Excellency."

"And do you still maintain that it was true?"

"Yes, your Excellency."

"Then it may interest you to know that M. de Chatillon has placed in my hands indubitable proof that you left Auvergne as the companion of the late M. de la Roux, and travelled with him at least as far as Paris."

"M. de Chatillon has missed his vocation. He should have been a lawyer," I said. "Is this the evidence on which he accuses me of murder?"

"Not altogether," replied the Governor.

"I should be glad to hear the rest of his story, your Excellency," I said.

"You shall," said the Governor. "When you arrived I sent for him, and he is doubtless here by now."

He rang the bell that stood on his table. An attendant entered, and on his instructions ushered in M. de Chatillon.

CHAPTER XXXVI

If there had ever been a time when M. de Chatillon would have felt compunction or displayed embarrassment in openly seeking to compass my destruction, that time had passed; but he was not so unsophisticated as to glare at me or appear to gloat over me. He entered with an air of quiet, judicial dignity and saluted the Governor, merely casting at me an indifferent momentary glance. Since I had never regarded him with any liking whatever, I felt the less resentment against him now; I was curious to learn what information his researches had disclosed.

"M. de Chatillon," said the Governor, "acting on the information which you laid before me yesterday, I have had no choice other than to place M. Regnier under arrest. He has asked to be informed of the evidence on which I have taken this course, and in view of his long and faithful services, it is but fair that his request should be granted. Will you please repeat what you have already told me."

"The facts of which I have advised your Excellency," replied M. de Chatillon, "came to my knowl-

edge as the result of a search for the missing M. de la Roux. As your Excellency is aware, my cousin, Mlle. de Chatillon, who is now the ward of my father, set out for New France in search of M. de la Roux. I followed her, and when I found myself unable to dissuade her from her purpose, I accompanied her. Since coming to this country she has made a most perilous trip to the interior in furtherance of her object, but without result. When, a year ago, I heard of the voyage she was about to undertake to the country of the Hurons, I felt that something should be done to prevent an indefinite continuance of such rash enterprises, and I despatched a letter to my relatives at home asking them to ascertain, if possible, whether M. de la Roux ever actually set sail for New France. Their enquiries for a long time led to no result, until by the happiest of chances they came upon the woman whom M. Regnier married,—the same who has recently come to this country to claim her long lost husband. She heard of the enquiry that was on foot in regard to M. de la Roux and made it her business to learn from whence it emanated; when she had found out, she came to my father and explained to him that when she had last seen her husband he was in the company of M. de la Roux, and to the best of her knowledge they had left Auvergne together. This clue directed the efforts of my relatives to a collateral

search for M. Regnier, and the woman's knowledge of his friends and habits enabled them to trace the two to Paris, where they were seen together. Nothing further might have come of it had not M. Simon, who was here this summer, happened to mention that he had made the acquaintance and enjoyed the hospitality of a M. Regnier who had said that he came from Auvergne."

I reflected that if I had taken advantage of M. Simon, I was now paying a heavy penalty, but I did not interrupt M. de Chatillon's story.

"On questioning M. Simon," continued M. de Chatillon, "it seemed from his description of the man who had entertained him, that he was of an age and appearance corresponding with that of the Regnier whom they were seeking. It was suggested that his wife should be sent out to identify him, and with this plan she fell in eagerly, with the result that she is now here."

"However," I said, "she has not yet identified me."

"Unfortunately she is not yet in a condition to do so," said the Governor thoughtfully.

"And is this the evidence on which M. de Chatillon has laid against me a charge of murder?" I asked.

M. de Chatillon continued, without appearing to notice my question.

"When this information reached me, I recollected

that although this man well knew we were in search of M. de la Roux, he had from the first professed entire ignorance of him. In other words the case was this; M. de la Roux had set out for New France with him; M. de la Roux had disappeared before reaching New France; this man, who should have known better than anyone else what had become of him, says that he knows nothing of him. What possible motive could he have had for concealing his knowledge other than this, that his secret was a guilty one?"

The Governor shook his head gloomily. "The evidence is against you, M. Regnier," he said. "What explanation have you to make?"

"Merely this, that I was not, and am not, the Regnier who left for New France with the Vicomte de la Roux."

"It is a common practice of criminals to deny their identity," said M. de Chatillon.

"It is a common practice of knaves to falsely accuse their enemies of crime," I said, "especially when other efforts to destroy them have miscarried."

"Be silent, Sir!" exclaimed the Governor, "such language in my presence is unseemly."

"But if I am a criminal, why has M. de Chatillon permitted me to run at large this last fortnight? Why did he delay these revelations until after he had forced me into a fight and had had his conceit of his

own prowess shattered? Is it his desire for justice that actuates him,—or is it his desire for a safe revenge?"

"It is not a question of the motives of M. de Chatillon. It is a question of your guilt or innocence," replied the Governor.

"Is not the burden of proof upon him, your Excellency?" Must he not show, first, that I am the Regnier whom he says me to be, and second, that the Vicomte de la Roux is in fact dead?"

"On the first point," said the Governor, "we must await the recovery of Mme. Regnier,—when that is settled, it will be easier to deal with the second. In the meantime, guilty or innocent, I must keep you in confinement."

He rang his bell again, and M. Daniel entered.

"May I ask, your Excellency, what reports you have of the health of this woman who claims to be my wife?"

"She is very ill," replied the Governor. "I am informed that the least agitation might have fatal results."

"Is it not possible for me to be taken into her presence," I urged, "I should do nothing to upset her, and should she fail to recognize me it would surely settle the matter?"

The Governor shook his head. "When she is not

delirious, she is sunk in stupor," he said. "There is nothing we can do but wait until her mind is clear. I hope she will then confirm your statement that you are not the Regnier she seeks; in the meantime you must go with M. Daniel."

CHAPTER XXXVII

To a prisoner, fair weather and foul are alike distressing; if the sun be shining he longs to be out, and if the weather be dark his spirit is oppressed by the gloom within.

Thus dismally cogitating, I sat by the barred window of my cell and contemplated the heavy wet mist that lay over all out doors and well nigh concealed from view the dripping palisades that surrounded the fort and the glistening black guns that peeped out through their embrasures. Save for the sentry, the enclosure was deserted, and lacking other objects of interest my thoughts turned to my own affairs.

Although, to a superficial observer, my position might have seemed alarming, I was not deeply concerned, since I felt that matters would be straightened out in due course; but I was dejected by the manner in which those whom I had thought to be my loyal friends had fallen away from me at the merest accusation of wrong-doing. I had thought I enjoyed the confidence of the Governor; many a time I had served him well and faithfully in emergencies in which

he had called upon me to perform duties for which, by reason of my long experience, I was peculiarly fitted. But all his confidence was not enough to keep me out of prison. I had cherished the friendship of P. Dufour as of no one else; for years we had been to one another as father and son, and had been drawn together by countless bonds of dangers dared and hardships shared in company. Yet I had been a prisoner for a week and he visited me not, nor had I heard from him. I had cut the cords that bound me to my home, and left every possession to care for itself as best it might while I journeyed through the trackless forests for months and years to guard and succor Mademoiselle; I had married her that I might better take upon my shoulders her troubles and perplexities and fight in her quarrel. And now she despised me as a wife-deserter, loathed me as a deceiver and feared me as an enemy. In a consideration of my own affairs there was little to enliven me.

My thoughts were interrupted by the entry of Michaud, the taciturn old soldier who for the occasion (criminals being rare in New France) performed the unaccustomed duties of turnkey and attendant. He carried with him an appetizing dish of stewed lamb which had been brought by faithful André, and set it on the table.

I turned to greet him, and being in a mood for talk

rather than reflection, endeavoured to engage him in conversation.

"Well, Louis," I said, "how does this weather suit your rheumatism?"

"Ill."

"Have you been out and about this morning?"

"Yes."

"Then you must tell me the news of the town. What is the latest gossip?"

"No news," he said.

"Does anyone ever ask you for news of me?" I enquired.

"Many."

"That at least shows there are some who have not forgotten my existence. And what do they ask?"

"They want to know what you say, and what you do, and what you eat."

"And what do you tell them?"

"That you say little, do little and eat little."

"That is true enough. I say little because I have no one to talk to but you. I do little because I have nothing to do. I eat little because I do little and have therefore no appetite. A quiet and restful life, Louis, but tedious and unhealthy."

He grunted.

"In fact, Louis," I said, "I begin to look forward with keen desire to the time when I shall regain my

liberty. I have always had a high respect for the law, and I suppose I should not complain at being held in durance for a time that the law may be vindicated. But I tell you frankly I shall be glad when this lady who calls herself Madame Regnier, and claims to be my wife, regains her health to such a degree that she is again clear in her mind and able to settle the matter by testifying that I am, after all, not the man she is seeking so persistently."

He looked at me queerly.

"Then you are relying on her testimony to set you free?" he said.

"Naturally," I replied. "I happen to know I am not her husband, and therefore not the man against whom M. de Chatillon has launched his accusations. She has no reason to identify me falsely, though I would not venture so far as to believe M. de Chatillon has no motive but a desire for abstract justice. I understand this Regnier who married her has not treated her well, and she has no love for him; but her dislike will surely not be transferred to me."

"But if she does not certify that you are not the man, what then?" he asked.

"Why then,—" I said, "why then, I should be in a more awkward position than I am in at present. I should have to look about for other means of establishing my innocence of the crime of which M. de

Chatillon accuses me. But what makes you ask such a question?"

He regarded me more queerly than ever, but made no answer.

"Incidentally," I said, "have you heard what progress she is making toward recovery?"

He hesitated. "I,—that is——" he paused, awkwardly fumbling with his hand in his pocket.

"That is what?" I asked impatiently.

"Her evidence will not help you," he said.

"Indeed? And why not?"

"Because,—she is dead."

CHAPTER XXXVIII

The death of Mme. Regnier was a source of embarrassment to all concerned. To me it was embarrassing because I had looked to her evidence to finally clear me of the accusations under which I lay. To M. de Chatillon it was embarrassing, since he had relied on it to conclusively incriminate me. To the Governor it was embarrassing, since he was now under the necessity of taking some action or other, and the decisive information upon which he had hoped to base his judgment was irrevocably lost to him. To Mlle. de Chatillon it was doubly embarrassing.

I did not relish the idea of remaining in prison indefinitely, and I lost no time in forwarding to M. de Montmagny a petition urging that I should be promptly brought to trial or set free. As a result of this communication I was again ushered before him.

When I entered his presence he had my petition in his hand, studying it.

"I have sent for you," he said, "that I may hear what you have to say in support of this."

"It should be necessary for me to say but little,

your Excellency. For a number of years I have lived a respectable life in this colony. Recently I was despatched by your Excellency on a mission of importance,—a mission not without toil, not without hardship, not without danger. This mission successfully accomplished, I returned, to find that in my absence a woman had arrived who called herself Madame Regnier, and sought me with the idea that I was her missing husband. I asked to be allowed to meet her that she might satisfy herself I was not her husband, but was told she was so ill that this was not permissible. Later, M. de Chatillon produced evidence that the Regnier who was her husband was known to have left Auvergne in company with M. de la Roux, whose whereabouts has since remained unknown, and on the assumption that I was that identical Regnier, I was accused of having done away with him. Again I asked to be taken before her that the mistake might be corrected, and again I met with refusal; and this time I was put into prison. And now she is dead, and M. de Chatillon has failed of his object in bringing her to New France, since her evidence is no longer obtainable."

"Then you consider the case against you has collapsed?" he enquired.

"There never was a case against me, your Excellency. I am not the man she sought."

"So it becomes your word against the word of M. de Chatillon?"

"Not at all, your Excellency. Were he the most truthful of men, what he says could have no weight, since he admittedly does not speak of his own knowledge."

The Governor pondered my words in deep perplexity.

"On the face of it," he said, musingly, "your contention is sound. We cannot imprison you for an unlimited time on the mere suspicion that you are someone whom you claim not to be. On the other hand——" He fell into a brown study.

"If I am released," I continued, "I have no intention of leaving my home. You can ensure that I do not take ship for France, and I am not likely to abandon all I possess and flee into the interior. Is it not bad enough that I am left under a cloud, and my friends have fallen away from me, without my troubles being accentuated by imprisonment?"

"No one could be more sorry for this than I am," he replied. "I have counted myself among your friends, but it is the sworn duty of my office to administer the law, and I should be as recreant if I were swayed by friendship as if I were deterred by fear."

"Tell me truly!" he said, suddenly. "Did you ever hear of this M. de la Roux, or know him?"

"I heard much of him, your Excellency, and knew not a little of him, but I never met him."

"He was, I believe, a contemporary of yours?"

"He was of the same age, your Excellency."

"And do you know,—have you any idea,—what became of him?"

"Since leaving Auvergne I had heard not a word of M. de la Roux until Mlle. de Chatillon came here in search of him."

He sat in thought for a minute, then turned his attention to another subject.

"What is the cause of the hatred which exists between M. de Chatillon and yourself?" he asked.

"We were together almost constantly for many months, and liked each other less every day."

"P. Dufour has told me your courage and resourcefulness were all that saved them from the Indians," he said.

"He seems to have since forgotten it, your Excellency," I replied.

"What do you mean?"

"I have not seen him nor heard from him since I have fallen into trouble."

"But he has been away! He left Quebec the day before you were arrested, and has not yet returned."

I was glad to hear this, since his apparent defection had hurt me more than I cared to say.

"I am inclined to grant your request," said the Governor. "But I cannot release you offhand. I must think the matter over, and perhaps have another word with M. de Chatillon."

"I pray that your Excellency will not let him persuade you to keep me in durance until he can trump up further charges against me. If you release me I give you my word that I shall not try to run away."

He nodded, and signalled for Michaud to enter and take me back to my cell.

CHAPTER XXXIX

A COLONY peopled for the most part by soldiers, priests and nuns has little of the vitality which comes of natural increase of population, and this was unfortunately the case with New France. Immigration languished, to the chagrin of those in authority. The country offered little but hardship to the ordinary settler, while those who found old France uncongenial by reason of their dislike for the restrictions which their position in life imposed upon them, or the oppression to which they were subjected on account of lack of orthodoxy in religion, had nothing better to hope for under the paternal and hieratic government of Quebec. To combat this slowness of growth every effort was made to encourage unmarried men to take unto themselves wives and to persuade married men to bring out the wives with which they were already blessed. To this encouragement and persuasion my friend Michaud had some time before lent a consenting ear, with the result that he had a buxom spouse several years his junior, and three fine children. His means not having increased in proportion to his responsibilities, they sometimes had difficulty in mak-

ing ends meet; but his good wife Jeanne found occasional work with the Ursulines, and, all things considered, they were a rather happy family.

He doted on his children, and had no slight respect for his better half, and his family was the one subject on which he was disposed to be communicative. Knowing this by experience, I often sought (when in a talkative mood) to elicit a flow of conversation by enquiring in regard to his domestic affairs. But when I broached this fertile subject the day after my audience with the Governor, Louis heaved a sigh of deep distress.

"My poor wife!" he said, "She is very ill, she is down with the fever."

"What fever?" I asked.

"The fever!" he repeated vaguely. "The same that your,—that,—that Madame Regnier died of."

"My faith!" I said, "I am more than grieved to hear that. But are you sure it is the same?"

"My wife helped to nurse her," he explained. "She has felt tired and done out for a week or more. Yesterday she had a chill—it was terrible the way she shivered and shook,—and to-day she is hot,—so hot, —and she does not know any one,—not even me!"

"Poor Jeanne!" I said, "but she is young and strong. She will made a good recovery. Who is nursing her?"

"She is with the sisters at the Hôtel Dieu. They are very good, and there is nothing they can think of that they are not doing for her."

"I am sure they will do their best," I said. "You must not be downhearted, Louis!"

He shook his head dolefully. "It is a terrible disease," he muttered.

"Tell me," I asked, "is there anyone else down with it?"

"One or two of the sailors who came on the ship have had it,—but they are on the way to recovery."

He went about his task of sweeping the room in a slow, listless manner, making little reply to my efforts to cheer him, and presently sat down wearily and wiped the perspiration from his face,—a thing I had never before seen him do; he had always seemed to be one of the wiriest, most dried up old fellows I had known. I gazed at him with much pity to see how utterly dejected he was; his unkempt appearance was eloquent of misery in one who was usually neat and clean, and even as I watched him a flea jumped out of his clothes. I sprang to kill it, for I had no liking for such vermin about me, but it escaped, and later bit me shrewdly before I at last put an end to it; he made no move to help me, being too much wrapped up in his trouble to take interest in the matter.

Anon he rose to his feet and departed, and as I heard him slowly stumping down the stairs, the reflection came to me that all troubles are comparative. I had thought myself abused by fortune, but assuredly I would not have cared to change places with my jailor. The real troubles of life are those that fall, not on ourselves, but on the ones we love. From him my cogitations turned to the strange and inexplicable manner in which a pestilence propagates itself, passing imperceptibly from one person to another, as it were in poisonous vapour or exhalation that none can see or feel; a silent yet deadly enemy which chooses its victims at random and smites them with a stroke not felt for days,—planting in them a seed that grows slowly but none the less surely to its ugly fruition.

I looked out of the window at the snow which lay thick on the ground (for winter had now set in) and wondered how much longer I should be constrained to linger in captivity; my expectation of an early release raised in turn the difficult problem of my relations, present and future, with Mlle. de Chatillon.

If I had been disappointed of the exoneration I had hoped for, and left under a cloud, she, for her part, was in a situation no more pleasant, since she had now no means of obtaining conclusive evidence as to whether or not her marriage with me was lawful and binding. Nor could she hope to evade the ques-

tion indefinitely. M. de Chatillon was not one to neglect the advantage of which he was now possessed as being the man chosen by her guardian for her husband; even had she wished to marry him, she would hardly be reckless enough to do so under the circumstances, so that if she were hard pressed her position would be awkward.

Though my feelings toward her were tinged with resentment, I could not but recognize that her difficulties had been increased rather than diminished by the deplorable outcome of my well-meant but unfortunate intervention in her affairs, and it was obviously my duty to clear up her perplexities without delay. In the first flush of anger I had told her I would wait till she sent for me, and she had seemed content that I should do so; but I was now determined that so soon as I was free, I would seek an audience with her (which she would scarcely refuse) and make plain to her the facts she was now entitled to know. What action she would then take was for her to decide, not me; my mood was such that I felt less concern on that score than I had ever thought would be the case.

CHAPTER XL

THOUGH the attitude of the Governor had seemed favourable, he was slow in making up his mind, and I had had no word yet from him when, a week later, I received a visit from P. Dufour. Though we had not parted on the best of terms, I was glad to see him and gave him a warm welcome.

I learned from him that he had been down the river among the Montagnais, and had experienced considerable hardship on his way back. He assured me he had arrived only the night before and had hastened to come to me on hearing of my incarceration.

"But this is preposterous!" he declared. "To think that you, of all men, should have been locked up on so absurd a charge! I am astounded that M. de Montmagny should have taken such action."

"Why preposterous?" I asked. "If my friends believe me guilty of wife desertion and bigamy, why should the Governor refuse to entertain against me a charge of murder?"

It was a knotty question, and he considered it in silence.

"I do not desire to offer you a rebuff in return

for your kindness in coming to see me," I continued. "In fact, I believe if you thought me actually guilty of murder, you would befriend me none the less. And if you did think me guilty of murder it would disappoint me no more than it does that you ascribe to me the lesser crimes."

"M. Regnier," he said, slowly, "I have had but little chance to discuss this matter with you. If I have seemed to assume that you were guilty it was because your denial was tardy, and to my mind lacked candour. That is to say, I did not so much doubt that you were telling the truth as I doubted that you were telling the whole truth; and long experience has taught me that any man, however honest, however faithful, however truthful, is liable to moments of weakness where women are concerned, and may in some such moment be guilty of a mistake or a fault that in after life he will be indeed loath to confess or acknowledge. In the face of a declaration of entire innocence, I have now no choice but to believe you, though there is much that you are withholding. And you must admit that if, for the minute, I assumed you were entangled with the poor woman who has since died, I did so in no unkindly spirit."

"In truth, your attitude was more charitable than that of Mlle. de Chatillon," I said. "She made her viewpoint clear enough."

"If you would imagine yourself in her place, and seek to understand her feelings, you might perhaps not speak of her with such coldness."

I shrugged my shoulders. "After all," I said, "I suppose I have no great claim on her forbearance."

"Not more than she has on yours," he replied.

"How so?"

"Consider her position. A young woman, barely of age, she made the distressing discovery that the father whom she had loved and honoured was a swindler and a knave. When she set about the task of righting the wrong which her father had done, her cousin, who had posed as her lover, followed her with protestations of regard and concern, and a gradual disillusionment ensued, until finally she learned him to be actually party to a dishonest plot against her freedom. That was a second shock to her belief in the honesty of men. She was hard pressed, and you suggested she should marry you. You know how the world looks on unequal marriages,—how people scorn the woman who weds beneath her rank. But she braved the prospect of ridicule and contempt, comforting herself with the belief that you, at least, would not play her false. She was married to you, and within twenty-four hours another woman arrived on the scene, who sought you and claimed to be your wife. And in your absence, Mademoiselle, thinking

over the alarming situation thus presented, was appalled to realize how little she knew of you. The other woman made no question of your identity. She was positive it was you she had come to seek, and your age and the date at which you had come to New France fitted in only too well with her story. Moreover, the very readiness you had displayed in offering to enter into a marriage of convenience, with the avowed object of breaking it asunder at some later date, seemed to lend colour to the woman's claim that you were one who regarded the ceremony of marriage and the responsibilities of married life with but little respect. And so Mademoiselle found herself faced with an ugly prospect. It was one thing to openly avow her marriage with a man who, however humble his station, deserved and enjoyed the respect of all who knew him. But to acknowledge herself the dupe and gull of a wife-deserter and bigamist,—that was something else."

"And now," I said, "now that to those unsavoury characteristics I add the evil distinction of being a murderer,—and in particular the very murderer who completed her late father's work by doing away with the man whom he had despoiled,—it is but natural that her indignation should be multiplied against me."

The Jesuit shook his head. "It has the opposite

effect," he said. "In other words, the idea that the man whom Mme. Regnier sought was guilty of another, more heinous crime, inclines her to the belief that after all it cannot be you."

"A curious attitude."

"But not unnatural. The question of your guilt or innocence in respect to M. de la Roux does not begin to touch her so nearly as the question of your previous marriage, and she is able to form a calmer and more sober judgment of the merits of the case."

"Yet it must not be forgotten that the marriage was one of convenience only," I persisted. "Why should it have touched her so nearly?"

"My son," said P. Dufour. "A young lady of her intelligence and high character would be hard pressed, indeed, before consenting to enter into a marriage of any kind whatever with a man toward whom she was wholly indifferent. Furthermore," he continued quietly, "a man of your qualities would not have proposed it had he been wholly indifferent towards her. And thirdly, I, for my part, should not have consented to perform the ceremony had I thought either of you to be wholly indifferent toward the other."

I pondered his words in silence for a long time.

"You have accused me of being lacking in candour," I replied. "Were I to deny the correctness of

your judgment so far as it concerns me, I should be guilty of it."

"You are guilty of it," he declared with emphasis, "you have merely admitted that which I already know. Do you not think it is quite time, M. Regnier, to tell me such of the things I do not know, as have a bearing on your present situation, and on the fortunes of Mlle. de Chatillon?"

"That is fair enough," I said. "The time for delay is past, and the reasons for secrecy are less pressing than those for disclosure."

I paused to light my pipe and consider how I should begin. P. Dufour settled himself in his chair with an expression of the most unconcealed interest. But a perverse fate intervened to prevent his curiosity from even now being gratified, for at that very moment a slow and uncertain step sounded on the stairs, and old Michaud staggered into the room.

At first I thought he was drunk, but a glance at his face undeceived me. It was the visage of a man taken with a deathly sickness. I sprang to save him from falling, and we laid him on the bed.

There was no question in our minds as to the nature of his malady. He had the same fever which had attacked his wife, and he was already in an utterly prostrated and half-unconscious condition. There was nothing to do but have him taken to the Hôtel Dieu

and placed under the care of the Sisters without delay, and the disturbance and bustle of doing this was such that P. Dufour and I had no further chance of private conversation. So great, indeed, was the confusion, that I was left without jailor, attendant, or supper, until I finally sallied forth and made my wants known; whereupon a soldier named Doucet was detailed to take Michaud's place.

CHAPTER XLI

DURING the entire period of my enforced seclusion André visited me with the utmost regularity every two or three days, to tell me all the news, and being for the most part the only visitor I had, he was doubly welcome. Every Friday, in particular, he would bring a fresh caught fish, and fish being something of which I am especially fond, I found peculiar satisfaction in demonstrating my steadfast adherence to the rule of the Church which prescribes it. But on the Friday following the visit of P. Dufour (who had been prevented by the pressure of his duties from revisiting me) I took less than usual pleasure in André's gift; my appetite, which had been growing more and more capricious for several days, had utterly failed me, to such an extent, indeed, that the mere sight of food nauseated me, and seemed to aggravate the severe headache from which I suffered.

I tried to thank him with enthusiasm, but my expression must have belied my words, for he remarked with great concern that I did not seem to be well.

"It is nothing," I said. "I should be better of outdoor exercise. Have you any news?"

He looked at me with a puzzled air. "Not news, exactly, M'sieu, but as I was coming across, I met M. Daniel and his two men. I do not know whom they were going for this time," he added, with a grin, "but it was certainly not for me, because they saw me, and made no attempt to stop."

"My faith!" I said. "Were you to be arrested and imprisoned, I should indeed be in bad case!"

He laughed, a boyish laugh, and shortly after that left me, expressing his earnest hope that he would find me better when he came again.

In this hope I fervently joined, for as I was I had little ease. The vile aching of my head, which was aggravated by every move I made, would have led me to lie down, had I not been driven by a growing and persistent chilliness to stride restlessly up and down the narrow length of my cell; but the exertion, instead of giving rise to a glow of comfort, induced only dizziness and exhaustion, and I had reached the point of throwing myself down on the bed and conceding that I was there for the rest of that day at least, when Doucet entered with the news that he had orders to take me before the Governor. Wretched as I was, my desire for a speedy release was such that I braced myself to the effort of accompanying him, and I followed him with uncertain steps down the stairs and across the enclosure of the fort.

When I entered the presence of the Governor, I was astonished to find there not only M. de Chatillon, but also Mademoiselle; looking from one face to another I wondered at the stern expression of the Governor, the smile of gratified malice on the visage of M. de Chatillon, and the sad and troubled look in the eyes of his cousin. I saluted without a word, and presently the Governor spoke.

"M. Regnier," he said, "when you were last here, you asked that you should be released on the ground that there is nothing to connect you with the Regnier who deserted his wife and left for New France with M. de la Roux."

I nodded.

"You declared positively that you were not the man."

"I am not the man, your Excellency."

"You assured me on your honour that you had never met M. de la Roux?"

"I did, your Excellency."

"And that you had heard nothing of him since leaving Auvergne?"

I nodded again.

"And on these grounds, and the lack of evidence to identify you, you contended that you should be released without further delay."

"That was and is my contention."

"Unfortunately for you," he said, slowly and impressively, "further evidence against you has been discovered."

I shifted uneasily from one foot to another. In the shaky condition in which I found myself, the strain of standing at attention was well nigh intolerable; my feet and legs were growing numb beneath me, and the Governor's words seemed to come from a distance, and his face and those of the others were as faces seen in a dream. Under the circumstances my patience was of the shortest, and I answered curtly.

"No doubt M. de Chatillon has been busy," I said.

"This evidence was not discovered by M. de Chatillon," replied the Governor.

"It seems strange that evidence on this old matter comes to light of itself in the very nick of time, after lying hidden all these years."

"After lying hidden all these years it has come to light to prove your guilt," he replied gravely.

"If your Excellency will have the goodness to cease speaking in riddles and tell me in plain words what you now have against me, I shall be infinitely obliged!" I cried, exasperated at his attitude.

He set his mouth grimly. "I shall tell you, Sir, in plain words. If this tale of yours be true,—if you never met M. de la Roux,—if you know nothing of what became of him after he left Auvergne with that

Regnier whom you claim not to be,—how do you account for the fact that we have found, in a chest in your house, all the valuables that remained to M. de la Roux after the ruin of his fortunes,—his family jewels,—the emblem of his order,—his sword,—the very clothes he wore,—how do you account for that, Sir?" he thundered.

I was in no condition for quick thinking, and I stared at him stupidly.

"That they are in truth his, there can be no doubt," continued the Governor, "we have brought here Mlle. de Chatillon, who is familiar with the insignia of the family of St. Étienne, and she has identified them beyond the possibility of dispute."

I made no answer. At this moment,—of all moments the most inopportune,—I found I had lost the power of speech. Through the gathering blackness which clouded my eyes I could see they were watching me keenly, and the thought came to me that they were bound to take my collapse as a sign of guilt.

"Well, Sir! What of it?" cried the Governor, insistently.

Again I strove to reply, and again words failed me. Despite my efforts to maintain my balance, I could feel myself beginning to sway, when who should seize my arm but Mademoiselle.

"He is ill!" she cried. "He is going to fall!"

Putting forth more strength than I had thought she possessed, she let me gently down to the floor, and kneeling beside me, thrust a cushion under my head, and there I lay with no power to rise. The chilliness that had been growing on me took full possession, and I shivered and shook so that my teeth chattered.

"Your Excellency's words seem to have been the cause of considerable discomposure to M. Regnier," said M. de Chatillon.

If anything could have roused me to speech that remark would have done so, but the defiant words stuck in my throat. Yet I was not without a defender.

"Whatever M. Regnier's faults may be, he is no coward," said Mademoiselle quietly. "I have never known him to gloat over an unfortunate enemy. He is not struck dumb by your Excellency's words. He has taken the fever, and is affected by it in precisely the same way as,—as those others who have recently suffered from it."

"Then we can do nothing more now," said the Governor. "I must send him back to prison until the disease has run its course. Should he recover he must stand trial. Should he die,—should he die, we may be spared from something to which I look forward with the utmost reluctance. In the meantime, I beg of you, Mademoiselle, leave him alone, lest you, too, take the fever even as he has done."

"No!" said Mlle. de Chatillon, and took my palsied hand in hers. "I will not leave him alone. If there be faith in any man, M. Regnier is innocent of the crime you ascribe to him. That he will clear himself if he survives this disease I do not doubt. But were he guilty it would not be for me to fail him. When I went into danger he accompanied me,—when I was attacked he defended me,—when I was carried away a prisoner, helpless and wretched, in agony and despair, he followed and staked his life on the slenderest of chances to rescue me from a fate worse than death,—in the wilderness he shielded and served me in all honour and respect, and brought me back in safety to my friends. I cannot let him be carried away,—helpless, dishonoured, wretched and alone,—to die in prison. I beg that your Excellency will permit him to be taken to the Hôtel Dieu, where he may receive the care of the Sisters."

"But Mademoiselle!" expostulated the Governor, "How can I do that? He is a desperate man. He is accused, and well nigh convicted, of murder. I cannot let him out of custody."

"I will go surety for him. If necessary place guards about the Hôtel Dieu night and day, and let them be at my charges and expense."

"Your Excellency!" cried M. de Chatillon, "this is arrant nonsense! As the representative of my

father, who is Mademoiselle de Chatillon's legal guardian, I protest against her being allowed to associate herself with this man or to become responsible for his custody or welfare."

"If you send him back to prison, I will go with him," said Mademoiselle.

"I forbid it absolutely," exclaimed M. de Chatillon.

"It is not yours to forbid," she said. "Neither you nor your father can control my actions."

"But Mademoiselle," said the Governor, patiently, "you well know that the notification of the court in regard to your uncle's appointment as guardian over you is in my hands, and I also hold his letter appointing M. de Chatillon as his representative. How can you dispute their authority?"

"And to dispute it for such an end,—that you may besmirch your fair name by championing the cause of a low-born felon,—a wife-deserter,—a thief,—a murderer!" said M. de Chatillon bitterly. "Is it for this that you put our guardianship at naught?—Is it for this?" he cried passionately.

"The guardianship which my relatives have sought to usurp might have restrained me from my duty as a Christian, to minister to him in his distress," said Mademoiselle. "It might have restrained me from my duty as a woman, to strive to discharge in part the debt I owe him,—but it avails not to restrain me

from my duty as his wife. Your Excellency, this is my husband!"

These words I heard, but no more. In the silence of amazement which followed them, I fell into unconsciousness.

CHAPTER XLII

The face of Sister Teresa was pitted with smallpox, her hair was turning gray, her large hands were gnarled and rough; but her eyes were kind and compassionate and her voice was quiet and gentle, and her good deeds live after her, so that the thought of her is like a long remembered fragrance or the sound of distant music. Yet she was not what we are accustomed to call saintly in that sense which implies an attitude of detachment from the mundane concerns of daily life; she could laugh at a joke, and even, at times, make one, and if her own life lacked romance she was the more interested in the romance that tinged the lives of others about her. To her care and skill and attention I owed much during my recovery from a very long, very distressing, and well nigh fatal attack of fever.

It is strange how the malign and violent humours of such a disease consume the tissues and sap the life of him who suffers with it. Prior to its onset I had been in the fullness of my accustomed strength and vigour; but when, after many days and nights of

wandering in a hot and weary desert, I woke again to consciousness, I had not power to raise my hand or speak above a whisper,—nor did I have the desire.

By that curious sense which enables us to judge the time of day, I guessed that it was mid-afternoon. The room in which I lay was bright and airy, and I assumed from the silence that I was alone, but in this I was mistaken, for presently I heard one of the sisters enquire of another how I did.

"He is asleep," she replied, "I think he is better."

"Do you think he will recover, Sister Teresa?"

"Now that the fever has left him, he may. But he is very weak."

"Poor fellow. He has little to look forward to. It is a sad case."

"He has not the appearance of one who would be guilty of the crimes of which he is accused. I pray the good God that he may succeed in clearing himself. P. Dufour insists that he is innocent; and he has known him intimately for many years."

"Beyond question he is a good judge of character."

"He is indeed. And Mademoiselle de Chatillon, —she also declares that he is innocent."

"Poor child! It will go hard with her should it turn out otherwise."

I stirred slightly, and their voices fell to a lower tone, so that I heard only snatches of their conversa-

tion. I gathered, however, that if my affairs had been a subject of interest before the latest disclosure, the knowledge that Mademoiselle was involved in them had now made them a matter of public concern, and the chief topic of conversation on every hand. This I could well believe, for her beauty and distinction had made her the cynosure of all eyes ever since her arrival in New France. It seemed that the information had got abroad that Mademoiselle had been married to me with the object of escaping the pressure that was being brought to bear on her to force her to become the wife of her cousin, and public sentiment was divided between sympathy and mild censure for her, dislike for M. de Chatillon, and for me (my guilt being generally taken for granted) utter condemnation.

Their conversation, which might have been thought likely to agitate and depress my spirit, had, nevertheless, quite the opposite effect; for they went on to comment on the assiduous and unremitting care of Mademoiselle for my welfare. With them, as with everyone who knew her (with the sole exception, perhaps, of her precious relatives) she was a prime favourite, and they dwelt with enthusiasm on every aspect of her character,—her energy, her judgment, her presence of mind, her steadfastness, her fearlessness,—to all of which, with a full heart, I inwardly

said amen, thanking God that so gracious a lady had been brought into my life, and reflecting that whatever might come of it, I could at least carry through the years a sweet memory of her that nothing could dispel. If she had aroused my resentment by seeming to doubt me, surely she had more than made amends by coming to my rescue in the hour of need,—by ensuring for me the utmost care and attention,—beyond all, by bravely taking on her stainless shoulders a full share of the disgrace and obloquy that clung to me. I blushed as I recalled the uncharitable thoughts I had entertained towards her in the weeks during which I had been in prison.

Of P. Dufour, too, there was nothing too good to be said; he had stood by me when he thought me guilty, and was now proclaiming my innocence on what I could not but admit to be the very slenderest of grounds,—to wit, my own unsupported word. As for M. de Chatillon, I could almost find it in my heart to pity him at being so ruthlessly disappointed of his dearest hopes,—though my physical weakness doubtless had something to do with that attitude of mind.

From my affairs their talk drifted to a discussion of the methods of treating the disease from which I suffered, and incidentally I learned with pleasure that both Louis Michaud and his good wife had turned the corner and were now well on the road to recovery; as

a matter of record it may here be said that for whatever reason,—whether they had had the fever more lightly than I, or had naturally more robust constitutions than I, or perhaps had less to worry them,—whatever the reason, they were out and about before I was able to sit up in bed. Week after week I lay, gathering strength in the slowest fashion as the winter dragged out its weary course. Mademoiselle and Père Dufour came to visit me often, but did not stay long at a time, for I was forbidden to talk or excite myself; and although on more than one occasion, well knowing the cause of the anxiety in his eyes or the sadness in her face (when she thought I was not looking) I sought to enter into an explanation that would relieve their worry on my account, they would not hear me, but told me to wait until I was better, and since I felt that I was on the road to recovery, and would in all human probability have an opportunity of clearing up the whole matter in due course, I let it rest at that.

CHAPTER XLIII

Sister Teresa was the soul of order. With her, more than with any other woman I have ever known, it was a place for everything, and everything in its place, except on Wednesdays, on which day she always conducted her weekly cleaning and saw to it that for the time being everything was out of its place. Her other weekly duties were conducted with the same unfailing regularity, so that after being under her care for a fortnight or so, no patient of even passable memory had need of a calendar, but could tell the days of the week by the course of her activities, from Sunday morning, when she gave him a specially painstaking washing and combing, and changed the sheets, to Saturday night, when she ended the weekly round by bringing him a glass of hot milk. Judge, therefore, how unsettled and inquisitive I found myself, when, one Friday morning, she suddenly threw regularity to the winds, and proceeded to perform on me, contrary to all order and system, the weekly cleansing I had deemed to be still two days distant.

When I asked her what was the cause of this new departure, she pursed her lips and told me I was to

have visitors; who the visitors were to be, she obstinately refused to say, and being still languid, I lacked interest or energy to press her.

Hitherto she had always herself trimmed my beard and hair with her scissors, and very well she did it, clipping deftly and rapidly and with such skill that she never tweaked a hair, but on this occasion she introduced yet another innovation by having in no less an artist than Robert Villeneuve, the barber.

"What now, Sister?" I said, as he entered the room with his towel over his arm and his bason and razors in his hands, "This is something new. I ask no better barber than you."

"You are to have your beard shaved off," she said. "As for me, I know how to use the scissors, but were I to try my hand with a razor, it might go ill with you. I might spoil your appearance rather than improve it."

The worthy Robert greeted me in confusion, experiencing evidently the awkwardness that one might naturally feel in meeting a familiar friend of long standing who had unexpectedly been exposed as a thief and murderer; yet there was in his attitude rather than his words the expression of a desire to be kindly and sympathetic that warmed my heart towards him and moved me to relieve his embarrassment by a show of jovial cheerfulness.

"It is an ill wind that blows nobody good, Robert," I said. "If I am to be shorn, it at least brings business to you. I have always foreseen that if ever I should fall into the hands of the gentler sex my beard would quickly go by the board, and now you see I was right. But what is the news? You of all men should be able to tell me the gossip of the town."

Involuntarily he glanced up at Sister Teresa, and following the direction of his eyes I saw that she had her finger on her lips.

"Why,—" he stammered, "why,—that is to say, there is no news of interest to-day."

Piqued by this show of mystery, I took it into my head to question him further.

"It is a sorry barber, Robert, who cannot think of news that will interest his customer. My own affairs, for example,—I wager you have heard more about them lately than ever you did before?"

"People talk a great deal," he replied with hesitation. "Some of them would be better engaged minding their own business."

"Do they regard me as innocent or guilty?"

"Some say one thing, others the other," he replied. "Some of your friends claim that it is all a mistake, and that you are innocent. Others are not so charitable. Still others declare themselves completely puzzled; perhaps after to-day they will be able

to——" he glanced up at Sister Teresa and suddenly checked himself.

"After to-day they will be able to,—what?" I asked.

But he shut his mouth firmly and looked appealingly toward Sister Teresa.

"You must not question him, M. Regnier," she said, "he has instructions not to weary you by talking to you."

"You mean, he has instructions not to enlighten me by talking to me," I retorted, in some ill-humour.

"Perhaps so," she replied quietly. "He has instructions not to talk to you."

My interest flagged at this, and I submitted in sullen silence to the ministrations of Robert, reflecting that it mattered little whether I learned their plans sooner or later. Early knowledge of that which has happened or is about to happen, is often most desirable when one is in a position to take action on such knowledge; but if one be utterly helpless to govern or change the course of events, either directly or indirectly, an undue hankering for such early knowledge is a mere manifestation of idle curiosity. As for their intimation that the information in regard to my expected visitors would weary me, it was palpably pretence; as if anything would weary me more than the excitement and agitation that such

elaborate preparations and such a portentous air of mystery might reasonably be expected to produce.

Robert's razors were keen, and he lathered my face long and industriously before applying them, so that my beard was removed smoothly and gently, with none of the pinching and scraping against the grain to which less competent barbers are driven by their laxity in making preparation for the actual shaving. When he had finished, I felt my cheeks, and the unwonted smoothness of them was such that I was curious to see what I looked like, and I asked Sister Teresa for a mirror.

A man's own face is to him the most familiar of all sights. He knows its peculiarities so well that he fails to notice them; but it was many years since I had seen myself without a beard and moustachios, and I seemed to be looking at the visage of a stranger,—a white-faced, sunken-eyed, hollow-cheeked stranger. Yet there was something about the sight that vividly brought back my youth,—the days when I earnestly counted the silken hairs on my lip and wished for a more luxuriant growth, and sought to gain by martial prowess the respect to which my whiskers did not yet entitle me. Lost in old memories, I lay and gazed in the mirror for what must have been a long time, so absorbed that I barely noticed the noiseless departure of Robert.

"Well," said Sister Teresa at length, "have you finished admiring yourself, M. Regnier?"

Still looking in the mirror, I smiled at her remark; but the smile was such a grotesque grimace that it would have provoked laughter in the most serious of men. When I laughed the effect was still more ludicrous, so that I fell to laughing even more heartily; and being in a weakened condition, I might have gone on to such an extent as to harm myself, had not Sister Teresa, who was not in the joke in the first place and became more indignant as it progressed (thinking, no doubt, as good souls sometimes do under such circumstances, that I was laughing at her) finally snatched the mirror from my hand and hung it up in its place on the wall. At this my laughter subsided; but I was still chuckling over it (and over her manifest annoyance) when the door was opened and P. Dufour entered the room.

CHAPTER XLIV

The good priest's face was serious and anxious as he came in, but when he saw me in such apparent good humour his expression cleared, and a smile broke out on his countenance.

"You seem happy this morning, my son," he said.

"Why not?" I replied, "I have been washed, and combed, and shaved and I am to receive visitors,—to what purpose I know not."

"I have come to tell you of the visitors you are to receive," said P. Dufour.

"I trust it is not the case that one of them is the executioner," I said.

"Heaven forbid!" exclaimed the good Jesuit, crossing himself with an expression of horror. "Whatever made you think of that?"

"Your coming to prepare me for them," I replied.

He shook his head. "You have grotesque ideas, my son," he remarked. "Far from being unfavourable to you, to-day's event will, I hope, result in your definite and complete vindication."

"That is interesting, and promises well," I said. "How is this vindication to be brought about?"

"It is another illustration of the workings of Divine Providence in answer to prayer."

"Not in answer to prayers of mine," I said.

"Then perhaps in answer to my prayers,—and those of others who are interested in your fortunes," he replied gravely.

I made no reply, being, in fact, a trifle ashamed of my remark.

"By the goodness of Divine Providence," he resumed, "it came to pass that M. de Maisonneuve arrived in Quebec during the past week. Yesterday I was in conversation with him, and he asked in regard to you. I told of your misfortunes, which grieved him deeply; when I related the cause of them, and came to mention the name of the late M. de la Roux,——"

"Why 'the late' M. de la Roux?" I interrupted. "Has someone discovered proof of his death?"

"That is, of course, still an open question," admitted the Jesuit. "At any rate, I spoke of him as the late M. de la Roux, and was astonished to learn that M. de Maisonneuve had been acquainted with him many years ago in the army in Holland. The two gentlemen were, it seems, brother officers in the same regiment throughout three campaigns, and came to know each other well. He also recalled that the young M. de St. Étienne had had a servant of about

his own age, whose name was Pierre Regnier, and he felt sure he would know the latter should he see him again. M. de Montmagny, who had joined us during the conversation, took up this statement eagerly, and arranged on the spot for M. de Maisonneuve to visit you to-day and say whether he can identify you or not. So you see, if he is able to positively declare he does not recognize you, it will go far to incline the Governor to accept your explanation of your having possession of the property of the Vicomte de la Roux."

"I admit that it needs an explanation," I said. "But if M. de Maisonneuve should happen to recognize me,—what then?"

"It would make your explanation more difficult, my son," said P. Dufour gravely.

"On the contrary, Father,—it might make it seem even more plausible," I said.

He looked at me with a puzzled air, but did not press me for an explanation of this cryptic remark, and we fell into silence for a time, while Sister Teresa continued to busy herself in making the surroundings neat and tidy.

"I had an interesting talk with M. de Maisonneuve about the Vicomte de la Roux," said the Jesuit. "He told me of a phase of his life of which I had heard little from Mlle. de Chatillon,—his military reputation, and his exploits in the army. He was regarded

by all as destined for leadership, and his misfortunes and sudden disappearance were the subject of much speculation and enquiry."

"One would expect them to have inferred that the pay of his rank would not be sufficient to enable a penniless man to occupy the position he had held as the heir of la Roux," I said.

"Doubtless that had much to do with his failure to return to military life," agreed P. Dufour. "But he was not without friends whose influence would have helped him greatly. M. de Maisonneuve, for one, seemed deeply affected when he heard of evidence having been found that indicated he was no longer alive."

"Perhaps he preferred a life of poverty with reasonable independence to that of a seeker of the favours of the great," I suggested.

"If so, he deserves credit for the preference," said P. Dufour. "I well know that more of material success is gained in this world by favour than by merit, and if a man desires to attain wealth or position, the surest method by which to achieve it is by waiting assiduously upon those who have it to bestow. But even to the worldly man, wealth and position are of small value if he be handicapped,—or blessed,—with sufficient discernment to enable him to perceive what a sorry figure he presents when he demeans him-

self to obtain them; to such a one a measure of independence and self-respect is likely to seem of more value than the rewards of a sycophant."

Sister Teresa had been looking out of the window and she now turned towards us. "Here they come," she said. A moment later we heard footsteps and voices outside. Before the two Governors entered, Mlle. de Chatillon slipped into the room and, greeting me with an encouraging (though somewhat wan) smile, came and stood beside my bed, that she might lend me the comfort of her presence and support in this critical moment, so charged with possibilities for good or ill.

CHAPTER XLV

ACCOMPANIED by the Mother Superior, the two Governors entered the room and took up their position at the foot of the bed. That M. de Montmagny was impressed by the serious import of the occasion was clear from the set and formal expression of his features; this was not surprising when one considers how incriminating was the evidence already discovered against me, and the disagreeable duty he would face should my identity be confirmed. For M. de Maisonneuve one glance was enough; I saw he recognized me instantly, but ere he could open his mouth the Governor was speaking, and he forebore to interrupt him, and fell in with the evident desire of M. de Montmagny that the proceedings should be conducted judicially and in order.

"M. Regnier," said his Excellency, "I grieve that it is necessary to impose this interview upon you in your present state of weakness. I had promised Mlle. de Chatillon to grant you a respite until you had fully recovered, in consideration not only of your long and faithful service in New France, but also in

consideration of her urgent representations on your behalf. But when I learned by chance that M. de Maisonneuve is in a position to throw light upon the matter, I felt it was in the interest of all concerned that he should have an opportunity to do so before leaving Quebec."

Turning to M. de Maisonneuve, he continued. "As you have already heard, Sir, events have occurred since M. Regnier's return to Quebec last Summer, which have resulted in placing him in a most compromising position. While he was absent on an errand on which I had sent him (to warn our people at Three Rivers of an impending attack from the Indians) there arrived on the ship St. Joseph a woman who gave her name as Madame Regnier and sought him under the impression that he was her husband. She came to me to ascertain whether he was in fact absent at my command or had got wind of her coming and fled to avoid meeting her. In the course of our interview she told me her story, from which it appeared that Regnier, then a young man, had married her secretly, and had shortly afterward left her and disappeared. This in itself was a serious matter, and on M. Regnier's return I asked him if he was in fact a married man, and it was only after considerable hesitation and evasion that he denied the woman's story that he was her husband. As she had taken ill

of the fever (which later, by a strange coincidence, attacked him also) it was impossible to afford her an opportunity to identify him, and I allowed the matter to rest, believing it could better be cleared up on her recovery. In the meantime, however, M. de Chatillon placed in my hands information which tended to implicate M. Regnier in a more heinous crime. M. de Chatillon's interest in the matter arose from his desire to assist his cousin in her search for the missing Vicomte de la Roux. In the course of the enquiries which he had set on foot, it came to light that when the Vicomte de la Roux left Auvergne he was accompanied by the same Regnier who married this woman. M. de Chatillon recollected that the M. Regnier whom we have here had been asked if he knew aught of the Vicomte de la Roux, and while he admitted he had known of him in Auvergne, he had professed entire ignorance of his subsequent movements. This fact, if he were indeed the same Regnier, obviously pointed to foul play, and I felt it was necessary to have him arrested and brought before me. He stoutly denied that he was the man. Again the matter rested on whether or not the woman would identify him as her husband, and I sent him to the guardhouse to wait in custody until such time as she could see him. But unfortunately her death followed not long after, and we found ourselves baffled. M.

Regnier had expressed the strongest desire to be brought before her, and when, after her death, he petitioned to be released on the absence of valid evidence against him, I was inclined to think that justice was on his side. I had him brought before me and questioned him once more, and he assured me with the utmost appearance of candour that he had never met the Vicomte de la Roux, and had heard nothing of him since leaving Auvergne, and I was disposed to believe him. Before setting him free, however, I felt bound to consult M. de Chatillon, and in the course of our conversation he suggested that M. Regnier's house should be searched. To this suggestion I gave consent, not for one moment expecting that aught would come of it. Judge then of my consternation when we found there a very complete collection of all the valuables which were left to the Vicomte de la Roux after the loss of his estate,—among them family jewels of quite sufficient value to provide an incentive for both robbery and murder. It was my most painful duty to have M. Regnier once more brought before me and to confront him with this most damning evidence of his guilt. When he entered my presence, I noted that he seemed ill at ease; when he heard his secret had been discovered he stood speechless before me and presently collapsed. I thought him overcome by his guilt, but Mademoiselle

de Chatillon (who was present to identify the belongings of the Vicomte de la Roux, in view of her familiarity with the insignia of his illustrious family) declared he was taken with fever, and in this she proved to be right. Another distressing feature of the case came to light at that time, which I may be pardoned for mentioning, since it was made known by her own statement, namely, that some weeks earlier she had been married to him, being led to that step by her desire to escape the guardianship of her uncle, which was being imposed upon her by the courts greatly against her will, and seemed likely to materially restrict her liberty; she had thought, as we all did, that M. Regnier, if of no great family, was at least a brave, resourceful and honest pioneer, and she had formed a liking for him due to their close association for over two years under conditions such as to make him appear to the best advantage. Both she and P. Dufour still stoutly maintain his innocence, and if there is one thing that makes me cling to the last shred of doubt in regard to his guilt, it is their persistent championship of him. I understand he has told them he can explain matters, and if you fail to recognize him I shall give his explanation the utmost consideration; but if you recognize him I cannot see that there is anything more to be said. So look well at him, M. de Maisonneuve,—his fate hangs on your words."

It was an interesting moment. With a gravity befitting the occasion M. de Maisonneuve made reply.

"Yes, your Excellency," he said, "I recognize him right well."

There was a crash of broken china as the bason which Sister Teresa had been holding fell to the floor, and a moan of dismay from the lips of Mademoiselle.

"Alas!" exclaimed the Governor, "then it is true."

"Tell them!" I cried impatiently, for I could not bear to think of her mental suffering being further prolonged, "Tell them who I am, and be done with it!"

"This gentleman," said Maisonneuve, all too deliberately to suit me, "Is not Regnier, the servant,—he is la Roux, the master,—Jean Paul Armand de St. Étienne, Vicomte de la Roux; and why he should not have let you know it long ago, is more than I can comprehend!"

"There are many things you cannot comprehend, my friend," I said, seeking, by an assumption of banter, to cover the embarrassment of the moment. But our conversation was interrupted by Mademoiselle, who swayed, and fell, white and unconscious, into the motherly arms of Sister Teresa.

CHAPTER XLVI

The excitement of the occasion upon which M. de Montmagny and M. de Maisonneuve visited me caused a slight return of fever, which did not amount to a relapse, but resulted in my being again forbidden the privilege of talking or having visitors for over a fortnight. This was the more necessary since, as I learned from Sister Teresa, there were many who had not troubled me with their attentions during the early part of my convalescence, but who now discovered a desire to call upon me and congratulate me on my recovery and assure me they had known all along that I was innocent of the absurd charges laid against me by M. de Chatillon. This had one good effect, in that it caused his popularity to wane to such an extent that he took the first ship for France that Spring, and troubled me no more. Later, he married a wealthy widow (a very handsome woman) and is no doubt as happy as he deserves to be.

The indisposition of Mademoiselle was but temporary, and she was able to come in and see me the very next day. She would not let me talk, and stayed but a minute or so; but I could tell from the returning

colour in her cheeks and the brightness in her eyes that whatever she might think of the situation as it now stood, it was more to her taste than it had been.

I felt that some explanation was due to my friends, and when at last I was once more able to sit up and look out of the window at the budding green of Spring-time (and no sight was ever more welcome to the eyes of any man) I took advantage of the opportunity given me by P. Dufour, who came in to sit beside me for an hour or so.

"Do you remember the last time we sat together, my son?" he asked.

"Why surely!" I said, "we were in the guardhouse at the fort, and I was preparing to tell you some of the things you did not know."

He laughed. "It is a pity we were interrupted," he said. "If you could have gone on it would have saved us all not a little anxiety on your behalf."

"I suppose so," I agreed. "At least I learned that I had friends who would stand by me to the very last."

"But why did you not disclose your identity long ago?" he asked.

"When the matter came up in the first place, I was reluctant to make it known for much the same reasons which originally led me to conceal it."

"What were your reasons?"

"When I found myself penniless," I said, "and without resources save the few trinkets and possessions which were discovered with such hubbub not long ago, I realized that I could not return to the army with my former status; such being the case, I preferred not to return at all. Since I faced the necessity of earning a living, I decided on a life of adventure, and being young and without family ties, I formed the project of coming to New France. My friend and servant, Pierre Regnier, fell in very eagerly with this plan, being for some reason anxious to get away. He was a good fellow, very faithful to me, though prone to become entangled with women. I had not the least idea he was married (and, in fact, never learned of it until recently, when his unfortunate wife came to New France in search of him) and deeming him to be, like myself, without family ties, I encouraged him to accompany me. We made our way to Paris, and there I first formed the idea of assuming some name less conspicuous than my own, for I found myself the object of pity, my loss of fortune having become generally known; the condition of a poor gentleman has ever been, in my opinion, an intolerable form of servitude in which one is the slave of his own pride. Poor Regnier's career of adventure was short; on the road to La Rochelle he was killed in the most commonplace way by a fall from his

horse. As I have said, I knew of no relatives to whom I could send word of his death; when he had been buried I proceeded on my way, not without dejection, for I had a great fondness for him. As I cogitated on the similarity of his case with my own as respected our being alone in the world, the thought struck me that I might do worse than adopt his name for the time being, since he would assuredly have had no objection had he been alive. Then and there I did so, and I have been Regnier from then until the other day, when M. de Maisonneuve proclaimed my original identity."

"But when Mademoiselle came in search of you, my son,—was not that reason enough for disclosing yourself?"

"It was a puzzling problem," I said. "I did what I thought best."

"How so?"

"Do you not remember that when you told me of the object of Mlle. de Chatillon in coming to New France, you also informed me that the estates she was seeking to restore comprised the whole of her possessions, so that were she to discover me and make restitution, she would herself by that very deed be reduced to want, and be faced with the choice of entering the Church, contracting a marriage which seemed unwelcome, or becoming a dependent on the

charity of her relatives. It would have been a strange return for her solicitude on my behalf had I allowed her to do that."

"But my son, she asked you if you knew of M. de la Roux, and you denied it. However benevolent your intentions, were you justified in departing from the truth?"

"I did not depart from the truth. I said that I had never met M. de la Roux. Was not that true?"

"But you said you knew nothing of him."

"On the contrary, I said that since leaving Auvergne I had not heard his name, which was also literally true."

The Jesuit shook his head. "You were sailing close to the wind," he said.

"Even before I had heard your account of the matter, I was aware that Mlle. de Chatillon had come to New France with the object of doing me a good turn, and I felt that it behooved me to go with you to the Island of Montreal that I might share the dangers which Mademoiselle would encounter in the course of her search for me, and perhaps help to avert them. I was in hope she would ere long realize the futility of her efforts, and return to civilization. When I heard she purposed going to the Huron Mission, I laid the whole matter before you and took your advice."

"Took my advice?" exclaimed P. Dufour, in astonishment. "You took my advice?"

"You did not know I was doing so," I replied. "Do you not remember our discussion of the Vicomte de la Roux and his magic carpet?"

"My faith!" he muttered. "What a dullard I was!"

"Acting on your suggestion, I again accompanied Mademoiselle, and in due course we returned to Quebec. Mademoiselle was no nearer the achievement of her purpose, and I was no nearer the solution of my problem, so I once more settled down to await developments. Then came this question of a guardianship and a forced marriage with M. de Chatillon, and I proposed the only alternative that occurred to me. It had certain advantages in addition to those which appeared on the surface, since Mademoiselle had no reason to dislike the Vicomte de la Roux, and the subsequent disclosure of my identity could hardly justify resentment on her part; and should she persist in turning over the estates I would be in a position to insist on making provision for her, which she could in such case accept without scandal. Were she content to remain as my wife, it would be a permanent and not uncongenial settlement of the difficulty."

"I am pleased to learn, M. le Vicomte, that you regard such an outcome as not uncongenial," remarked the old Priest drily.

"Since I had not known of Regnier's secret marriage, the events which followed were as disturbing to me as to any of us. I ought to have made my explanation at once,—but I was angered, as you know, and delayed making matters clear,—and when I was on the point of enlightening you we were interrupted, —and then the fever sealed my mouth,—but now I have told you all about it, and you can make it clear to Mademoiselle. I hope she will forgive me for my reticence."

"That is a matter which you will have to take up with her yourself, my son," said P. Dufour.

CHAPTER XLVII

I SAT in my garden in an easy chair, in the shade of a maple tree whose branches were stirred by the light breezes that carried the fragrance of the roses to my nostrils and tempered the heat of the early afternoon sun. The sky was blue as blue, with clouds here and there that melted and disappeared as they drifted towards the east. I had been making a pretense of working among the flowers, but I was not yet strong enough to wield a hoe with relish or vigour, and my efforts had given place to a leisurely tour of inspection, wherein I passed from plant to plant and did nothing more arduous than pick off an occasional worm or beetle that threatened leaf or bud. There are those who complain that roses are hard to grow by reason of the foes which prey upon them, and it is true that one who thinks to plant them and take no further heed save to admire them from a distance and gather flowers from them in season, seldom gathers aught but disappointment; but he who knows his bushes by name and passes from one to another, morning and evening, to see how they are growing,

will not overlook the curled up leaf or drooping bud that marks the presence of an intruder, and the pest, whatever it be, will have short shrift and do little damage. It may be said that the cultivation of flowers is a childish or womanish interest, not to be compared with the pursuit of fame or wealth or power; it has this merit, that one reaps the reward of his efforts as he goes along, and does not strain his tendons reaching for the moon.

As I have said, I was seated at ease in the shade, and very pleasant it was. Though I was still weak, I was not languid, and with every breath I drew I seemed to feel my strength coming back to me. I reflected that it was almost worth while to be ill that one might experience the comfortable glow of returning health.

When P. Dufour had escorted me home, a fortnight ago, he had said he would return ere long with Mademoiselle to discuss with me some matters in connection with the transfer to me of the estates of La Roux, and I found myself wondering when they would come. I had a feeling of expectancy, based on no reasonable ground whatever, that I should see them to-day, and this intuition proved to be correct; in due course I heard their voices, and a moment later they entered the garden. I rose to greet them, whereupon with one accord they urged me to be

seated, but I took pleasure in showing them that I was now strong enough to bring chairs.

When they had enquired about my health and we had discussed inconsequential matters for a time, P. Dufour proceeded to the object of their visit.

"And now, M. le Vicomte," he said, "now that you have been found,—or perhaps it would be more accurate to say, 'unmasked,'—it remains only for Mademoiselle to carry out the purpose for which she has sought you."

"And you have come, I presume, to obtain my consent?"

"As to that," said the priest, "I understand Mademoiselle has already gained your consent."

"Indeed?" I said.

"She tells me that when you suggested the marriage which took place last Summer, you assured her you would raise no objection to her transferring her wealth to the Vicomte de la Roux."

"I spoke of myself as her husband, not as the Vicomte de la Roux. What I meant was, that if she conferred on me certain legal authority over her actions, I would not use it to defeat her purpose. Nor do I now seek to so exercise that authority."

"You should have been a lawyer," said P. Dufour, "but before we begin arguing about general principles, let us look into the details. I have here a document,

—a document which——" he searched through his pockets again and again, and a blank look came on his face.

"Why, bless my soul!" he said, "I have left it behind."

"What does it matter?" I said. "It is not a question of documents."

"Chut!" he said, "do not let us get into an argument! I will tell you what I shall do. I shall go back with François, who can make the return trip in an hour or so at the most,—and in the meantime, if you seek an argument, you can argue with Mademoiselle." And without waiting for an answer, he jumped to his feet and hurried away to the landing stage.

It was a most transparent device for leaving us alone together. Evidently P. Dufour thought it was desirable we should settle certain aspects of the situation between ourselves, and there could be no good purpose served by further delay. Yet now that the opportunity was presented to us of free discussion, it did not seem easy to approach the subject, and we sat in silence, each waiting for the other to begin.

By the time a man has reached the age of forty he should have learned to keep his emotions reasonably under control, but I must confess that on this occasion I fell lamentably short; as I looked once more

on the rare and magnificent beauty which was so familiar to my eyes, yet always new and amazing,—as I noted the sweetness of her face, downcast to look at the flower with which her white hands toyed,—as I pondered the strange relation we bore to each other, and asked myself what was to be the outcome of it,—my heart thumped like the heart of a boy, and I had difficulty in maintaining even an outward appearance of composure.

"Do you remember when you first came to my garden, Mademoiselle?" I asked, at last, for lack of something better to say.

"Indeed I do," she replied.

"That is nearly three years ago," I went on. "We have had interesting adventures together since then, and have come to know each other well."

She nodded.

"The thought which passes through my mind is this, that both being reasonable, it should not be difficult for us to arrive at some reasonable settlement satisfactory to both of us."

"Is it not satisfactory to you that I should do as I have always intended?" she asked.

"Under certain conditions, yes."

"Under what conditions?"

"Briefly, that you remain as my wife and allow me to provide for you as such."

"But if I refuse to accept such provision?" she asked, slowly.

"Then your plan is as unsatisfactory to me as it was when I first heard of it."

"And will you continue your efforts to defeat it?" she asked.

"No," I replied. "I promised you I would not, and I will not. The decision is in your hands. I no longer seek to control,—I beg that you will do as I suggest."

She made no answer for a long time.

"Why did you not apprise me of the facts and take that attitude long ago?" she asked.

"I crave your forgiveness," I said. "I was selfish."

"Selfish!" she exclaimed. "In denying yourself wealth and ease lest I should be deprived of either?"

"Had I accepted them, I should have lost something far more dear to me than the estates of la Roux."

"What would you have lost?" she asked.

"The opportunity to be with you, to serve you, perhaps to gain your regard."

"And is that advantage no longer of value to you, that you are willing to lose it now?"

"I have already lost it. It would be presumption to oppose you further."

She fell again into silence. After a long time she rose to her feet.

"Since that matter is settled you must come and show me your garden," she said, and moved toward the path that led between the rose bushes.

I followed her, reflecting that to me it appeared to be far from settled. But she seemed to have put the subject out of her mind, and talked gaily of the different flowers, asking their names and admiring them each in turn, until we came to a corner of the garden which commanded a view of the river, and looking out over the water I saw not far away the returning sail of P. Dufour. I had not realized that we had been so long, and turned again to the matter she had so lightly dismissed.

"Tell me, Mademoiselle," I said, "you stated a while ago that our arrangements were settled. In what way are they settled?"

"On a basis of give and take," she replied. "You for your part will not oppose my wish to return you your estate; I for my part shall not refuse the provision you have so generously offered, so that I shall not go to the Ursulines empty handed."

"To the Ursulines?" I exclaimed, taken aback.

"Yes, M. le Vicomte, I like them all, and I think they like me; there is no other sisterhood I would prefer to join."

"You propose to join the Ursulines!" I repeated dully.

"Why not? Perhaps by the next time I see you I shall have taken the veil. I hope you will have entirely recovered by then, and be your old self again."

I stared at her, incredulous, as she told me of her intention, but when the full import of her words sank into my mind, my emotions at last overcame me utterly.

"Louise!" I cried wildly, "Louise! You shall not leave me! I cannot,—I will not,—let you go!" In my mad passion, I seized her in my arms, and drew her to me, and kissed her,—and kissed her, again and again.

Unresistant, with closed eyes and crimson cheeks, she suffered my embrace; when the fury of my emotion had burned itself out and reason began to resume control, I released her, and stood before her, panting and repentant.

"Mademoiselle, I crave your forgiveness," I said, "I was,—I was not myself."

"You frightened me," she said.

"I crave your forgiveness," I repeated like a parrot.

"Then you would sooner I did not join the Ursulines?" she said.

I looked at her, and she read her answer in my eyes.

"I wondered if you would let me go as readily as your words seemed to indicate," she said.

"Ah, Mademoiselle!" I cried. "If you have the least regard for my happiness, I ask,—I implore,—only this, that you delay your decision,—that you let matters stand for a time,—that I may have a chance, a hope, to kindle in your heart the fire that burns in mine!"

"There is nothing to be accomplished by delay," she said.

"But why not?" I exclaimed, despairingly.

"Because,—because,——" she stopped, and drew a sharp breath, "because, Monsieur, I am fain to confess that you are sufficiently dear to me even now."

In all reverence I knelt before her, and kissed her hand. "Adored lady, and most beloved wife," I said, "You have made me more happy than words can tell."

But she would not have me kneeling. "I, too, am as happy as you are," she said, simply. "I have loved you long, and I feared I was unmaidenly,—you were so cool, so composed, so seemingly heart free. But now that you, too, have,—have disgraced yourself——" and she laughed a breathless little laugh, "I know that you really have loved me as I have loved you."

Again, this time gently, I drew her to my breast,

and thus we stood in sweet commune, I know not how long, until our beloved friend P. Dufour softly entered the garden, and we looked up, unashamed, to meet his beaming eyes.

"Dear children," he said gently, "your happiness is mine."

He stretched forth his hands, and with full hearts we knelt side by side before him.

"*The Lord bless you and keep you:*" he said, "*The Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious unto you: The Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.*"

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S 73 116
124

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